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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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India calls US remarks on Kejri's arrest unacceptable

Kejriwal claims 'actual' excise scam started after ED probe

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Stating that India is proud of its "robust and independent" democratic institutions, Ministry of External Affairs called the remarks by US State Department on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as "unwarranted". India said that any such external imputation on electoral and legal processes is "completely unacceptable."

This comes after US State Department doubled down on its remarks that that they encourage "fair, transparent and timely legal processes" on the issue, a day after a US diplomat was summoned to communicate India's "strong objections" to the earlier remarks.

Earlier on Wednesday, US State Department spokesperson Mathew Miller was asked about his response to India's summoning US diplomat over comments on Kejriwal's arrest and freezing of Congress party's bank accounts, to which he said that they are following these actions closely.

Kejriwal to remain in jail till 1 April

The Rouse Avenue Court on Thursday extended the custodial remand of Kejriwal by four more days till 1 April in a money laundering case related to Excise Policy.

Kejriwal alleged that the "actual" excise scam started after the ED probe and not when the policy was made and that the agency's "two main motives" were to crush his AAP and to declare it corrupt.

He also alleged that the ED was running an extortion racket.

Arguing his case personally in Hindi for around 10 minutes after he was permitted by the court to do so, Kejriwal said a "smokescreen" of AAP being corrupt has been created before the nation.

"Are four statements enough to arrest a sitting Chief Minister?" he asked in a jam packed court room.

At the same time, Kejriwal told Special Judge Kaveri Baweja that he is not opposing the ED remand and that the economic intelligence agency can keep him in custody as long as it wants.

"There is no evidence to their(ED) claims that we have taken Rs 100 crore," The investigation began in August 2022. The 2021-22 Delhi Excise Policy was later scrapped.

HC dismisses PIL to remove Kejriwal as CM

Delhi High Court on Thursday dismissed a PIL seeking the removal of Kejriwal from the post of chief minister following his arrest.

A bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Manmohan refused to comment on the merits of the issue, saying the same fell outside the scope of judicial interference.

"It is for the other wings of the government to examine in accordance with the law," the

Kejriwal not keeping well, being 'harassed a lot', claims wife

Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal on Thursday claimed he is not keeping well and is being "harassed a lot".

Sunita Kejriwal, who had come for her husband's court hearing, told reporters, "His sugar levels are fluctuating. He is being harassed a lot. This tyranny won't last and people will give a reply." —*ANI/ PTI*

Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

'It's a political conspiracy'

A day after Delhi Lt Governor said the city government will not be run from jail, Kejriwal called it a "political conspiracy" and said "people will give a reply". Minutes before being produced in a city court on Thursday, Kejriwal was asked about Saxena's statement.

—PTI

AFTER NIA RAIDS

Rameshwaram Cafe blast key conspirator held

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

In a major breakthrough in the Rameshwaram Cafe blast case, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested a key conspirator following massive raids across multiple locations in three states.

The key conspirator, identified as Muzammil Shareef, was arrested on Wednesday after he was picked up as a co-conspirator as the NIA teams cracked down at 18 locations, including 12 in Karnataka, five in Tamil Nadu and one in Uttar Pradesh.

NIA, which took over the case on 3 March, had earlier identified the main accused, Mussavir Shazeeb Hussain, who had carried out the blast. It had also identified another conspirator, Abdul Matheen Taha, who is also wanted by the agency in other cases. Both the men are on the run.

NIA investigations have revealed that Muzammil Shareef extended logistic support to the other two identified accused in the case, involving an IED explosion at the Cafe located at ITPL road, Brookefield, Bengaluru, on 1 March.

PHOTO: PTI

Several customers and hotel staff members were injured, some of them grievously, in the blast, which caused extensive damage to the property.

The agency said "the raids were conducted today at the houses of all these three accused, as well as the residential premises and shops of other suspects."

During the raids, the NIA said various digital devices were seized during the searches, along with cash.

"Efforts are on to nab the absconding accused and unearth the larger conspiracy behind the blast." —*ANI*

Man killed over water dispute in Yadgir

YADGIR, 28 MARCH

A 21-year-old man from Yadgir district was killed in a clash over a water dispute on Wednesday. The deceased, Nandakumar Kattimani hails from Hunasagi town in the district. Nandakumar's uncle's son, Hanumanta, along with his mother Hanumavva, allegedly attacked him with a machete. According to police, both families had been using the government drinking tap situated near their residence. He succumbed to the injuries while at treatment. —*Salar News*

NCLT refuses to stay Byju's board meeting today

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) at Bengaluru has refused to stay the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) called by the board of Byju's for Friday. The board had called for the EGM to increase the authorised capital of its parent company Think and Learn Pvt Ltd to give effect to the rights issue. A coram of judicial member K Biswal and technical member Manoj Kumar Dubey ruled that it was not inclined to stay the EGM. The tribunal was approached by EdTech Investments, General Atlantic Singapore; Peak XV Partners Operations LLC; and Sofina alleging mismanagement by Byju's.

—*Bar and Bench*

Kota NEET pupil hangs self in, 7th suicide since Jan

BANDA, 28 MARCH

A 19-year-old NEET aspirant allegedly hanged herself at her PG room here, the seventh suicide by a coaching student in the city since the beginning of this year, police said on Thursday. Somya Kurmi committed suicide by hanging from the ceiling fan late Wednesday night, DSP Rajesh Tailor told PTI. A day earlier, another NEET aspirant Mohammad Urooj, 20, was found dead at his PG accommodation in Vigyan Nagar.

—*PTI*

Erode MP dies after attempting suicide

ERODE, 28 MARCH

Erode MP A Ganeshamurthi, who allegedly attempted suicide recently, died at a Coimbatore hospital on Thursday morning, sources from his party MDMK and police said.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin said Ganeshamurthi started his political journey in the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and effectively discharged his responsibilities in various capacities including the post of district secretary. Later, he traversed the political path along with Vaiko (MDMK Chief).

Vaiko expressed shock over the sudden demise and said he called on Ganeshamurthi's son Kapilan and daughter Tamilpiriya and conveyed his condolences.

According to police, the 77-year-old Ganeshamurthi had allegedly tried to kill himself after consuming some poisonous tablets on 24 March at his home here. He was rushed to a hospital here and later referred to another private institute in Coimbatore.

—*ANI*

A Ganeshamurthi **PHOTO: X/aganeshamurthi**

On-duty CISF jawan shoots himself at Kolkata airport, dies in hospital

A jawan of CISF allegedly shot himself while on duty at the Kolkata airport on Thursday morning and later succumbed to injuries in hospital, officials said. He was posted outside gate number 5 at the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport here. The 25-year-old C Vishnu shot himself with his service gun around 5.15 am. Vishnu was rushed to the nearby Charnock Hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries.

Jailed gangster Mukhtar Ansari dies of 'cardiac arrest'

BANDA/LUCKNOW, 28 MARCH

Jailed gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari died of a cardiac arrest at a hospital in Banda in Uttar Pradesh on Thursday, its principal said. Ansari was taken to the Rani Durgavati Medical College in Banda from the district jail after his health deteriorated. There was a heavy deployment of police personnel outside the hospital shortly after Ansari was taken there. Ansari, 63, was a five-time MLA from Mau Sadar seat and was behind bars in UP and Punjab since 2005. He had over 60 criminal cases pending against him. He was sentenced in eight cases since September 2022 by different courts of Uttar Pradesh and was lodged in the Banda jail. Prohibitory orders under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), which bars large gatherings, were imposed across the state following Ansari's death.

Earlier, Ansari was hospitalised for around 14 hours on Tuesday after he complained of abdominal pain.

On Tuesday, his brother and Ghazipur MP Afzal Ansari alleged that he was given poison in jail.The Samajwadi Party condoled Ansari's death.

—*PTI*

FROM 1 APRIL

Bengaluru-Mysuru expressway toll hiked

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

The Bengaluru-Mysuru expressway sees another toll rate increase, just a year after its inauguration. This is the third revision in toll fees since the opening of the highway. The Indian National Highways Authority (INHA) announced a 3 per cent toll hike from 1 April, 2024. The first hike occurred in April 2023, by 22 per cent.

Under the revised fare structure, one-way journeys for cars/vans/jeeps on the expressway will cost Rs 170, with a return journey within 24 hours priced at Rs 255.

Similarly, one-way fares for light commercial vehicles, goods vehicles, and minibuses have been increased to Rs 275, with a return journey priced at Rs 425, up from Rs 270 and Rs 405, respectively. The toll rates for heavy trucks and buses on the Nidaghatta-Mysuru expressway have been increased to Rs 580 for a one-way journey and Rs 870 for a round trip. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Category	Fee for single Journey in Rs		Fee for return journey in Rs	
	Old Rate	New Rate	Old Rate	New Rate
Car/jeep/van	135	170	205	255
LCV/LGV/mini bus	220	275	330	425
Truck/bus	460	580	690	580
Commercial vehicle	500	633	750	952
Heavy construction machinery	720	911	1,080	1,369
Oversized vehicle	880	1,112	1,315	1,668

PHOTO: PTI

FROM 1 APRIL, RBI TO STOP ₹2,000 EXCHANGE, DEPOSIT

MUMBAI, 28 MARCH

The facility to exchange or deposit Rs 2,000 banknotes will not be available on Monday, 1April, 2024 due to operations associated with the annual closing of accounts, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Friday. The facility will resume on Tuesday (2 April, 2024) at the 19 issue offices of the RBI, it added. On 19 May, 2023, the RBI announced the withdrawal of Rs 2,000 denomination bank notes from circulation. Nearly 97.62 per cent of the Rs 2,000 bank notes have returned to the banking system at the close of business on 29 February, and only about Rs 8,470 crore worth of the withdrawn notes are still with the public. People can deposit and/or exchange Rs 2,000 bank notes at the 19 RBI offices across the country. People can also send Rs 2,000 bank notes through India Post from any post office to any of the RBI issue offices. —*PTI*

Govt open to make changes in Agnipath, says Rajnath

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday defended the Agnipath scheme underlining that the future of youths joining as Agniveers would not be impacted, even as he said the government was "open" to bring any change in it "if required".

During a fireside chat on the concluding day of the Times Now Summit here, Singh, while responding to a question on the criticism of the scheme, said such questions have "no standing" and underlined that everyone will accept that the armed forces should have a young profile.

He said recruiting youths would result in an increased risk-taking spirit and more tech-savvy jawans in the armed forces.

Today is the age of technology and the Indian youth should also be tech-savvy. Such youths are being recruited under this scheme as Agniveers, Singh said. During the interaction, the Defence Minister also asserted that India and its borders are "totally secure" and the people of the country should have full faith in the armed forces. On the Agnipath scheme, the defence minister said "whatever changes may be brought in the system, and further looking into their future, the provision of reservation in services, all these have been ensured". —*PTI*

- On the Agnipath scheme, the defence minister said "whatever changes may be brought in the system, and further looking into their future, the provision of reservation in services, all these have been ensured".

'THREAT TO JUDICIARY'

Over 600 lawyers write to CJI, seek help

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

More than 600 lawyers, including senior advocate Harish Salve and Bar Council Chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra, have written to Chief Justice of India,(CJI) DY Chandrachud alleging that a "vested interest group" is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts, especially in cases of corruption involving politicians.

"These tactics are damaging to our courts and threaten our democratic fabric," the lawyers drawn from across the country said in the latter dated 26 March.

CJI's leadership is crucial in these "tough times" and the apex court should stand strong, they said, adding it is not the time to maintain dignified silence.

The letter, shared by official sources, targeted a section of lawyers without naming them and alleged that they defend politicians by day and then try to influence judges through the media at night.

DY Chandrachud **PHOTO: PTI**

This interest group creates false narratives of a supposed better past and golden period of courts, contrasting it with the happenings in the present, the letter said. It claimed that their comments are aimed at influencing courts and embarrassing them for political gains. Adish Aggarwala, Chetan Mittal, Pinky Anand, Hitesh Jain, Ujjwala Pawar, Uday Holla and Swarupama Chaturvedi are among the signatories to the letter titled "Judiciary Under Threat-Safeguarding Judiciary from Political and Professional Pressure".

Targeting the critics, the signatories to the letter accused them of suggesting that courts in the past were easier to influence. This shakes the public's trust in courts, they said. One important court case with political implications in the run up to the 2019 polls was the demand for a probe into the purchase of Rafale fighter aircraft over alleged corruption but Supreme Court had dismissed the batch of pleas in November 2018, saying there was no occasion to doubt the decision-making process in the deal. They urged Supreme Court to take steps to protect courts from these alleged attacks. —*PTI*

'To bully others is vintage Cong culture': PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said it is a "vintage Congress culture" to browbeat and bully others, remarks that came in reaction to more than 600 lawyers writing to the Chief Justice of India alleging that a "vested interest group" is trying to defame courtsCongress however hit back at Modi, accusing him of hypocrisy and "manipulating" democracy, after his criticisim over the lawyers' letter to CJI. —*PTI*

PWD engineer suspended over illegal assets

MANDYA, 28 MARCH

The State government suspended HR Harsha, Executive Engineer of the Mandya Public Works Department (PWD), for allegedly amassing disproportionate assets. The order, issued by Murulidhara S, Under Secretary to the Government of Public Works Department on Monday, comes after a report from Lokayukta police. The report, based on a criminal case registered on 30 January, claimed Harsha possessed assets exceeding his income. Reportedly, Harsha reported an income of Rs 1.4 crore, with expenditures totalling Rs 1,25 crore and savings amounting to Rs 14.49 lakh. However, Lokayukta probe revealed assets worth Rs 3.32 crore, of which Rs 3.18 crore were deemed to be illicit. As per the suspension order, Harsha's duties will be assumed by the designated authority with immediate effect.

—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

Fish meal factory gutted in Mangaluru

MANGALURU, 28 MARCH

A fish meal factory in the Baikampady Industrial area here was gutted in a fire incident on Thursday, officials said. The factory is owned by the company 'Shihar Enterprises', they said. According to the locals, the fire was first noticed at 4.45 am today, which was immediately reported to the fire department. The fire engines reached the spot and tried to douse the fire, but it had already spread to other parts of the factory. After almost four hours of fire-fighting operation, the blaze was completely doused, officials. The reason for the blaze is still being probed, the fire department officials said, adding that they suspect an electric short circuit could have triggered it.

—PTI

Mercury hits 35°C, IMD calls it 'unusual'

City has had above-normal temp since Feb

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Bengaluru residents are bracing themselves for yet another unexpected heatwave, with temperatures soaring up to 35 degrees Celsius in the city.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has confirmed the unusual rise in temperatures, which has come amid ongoing concerns about water scarcity in the city.

According to A Prasad, an IMD official, the City has been witnessing above-normal temperatures since late February. While March is typically warm, this year's rise is exceeding the normal temperatures of 33 degrees Celsius and reaching up to 35 degrees Celsius, almost a 2-degree rise.

Prasad attributed the heatwave to a factor of El Nino effect that has played a role, but it is expected to weaken after March. However, the lack of pre-monsoon showers has also contributed to the dry and hot conditions.

"It is because of the El Nino effect that the precipitation and cloud formations are getting difficult. Once the effect weakens in another week, we can expect a slight decrease in the temperatures. This can even disrupt typical rain patterns, which is why we did not have any pre-monsoon showers this month," Prasad said.

IMD predicts below avreage rainfall in April **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Meanwhile there's a glimmer of hope for some relief in April as the IMD predicts rainfall, which is expected to be below average, around 11 cm. "While this might offer temporary respite, it's not enough to address the water shortage entirely. It can help the City to reduce the heat for briefly at least," Prasad informed.

The heatwave has been the cause of concern for several districts in Karnataka, including Kalaburgi and Bagalkot, where the mercury has soared over 40 degrees Celsius.

However, Prasad said the reason why the temperatures in Bengaluru are not reaching such extreme levels is because the City is on an elevated platform, whereas these places are a bit downhill.

The ongoing heatwave has further exacerbated the water crisis in the city, with many residents struggling to find enough water for their daily needs. The government has urged people to conserve water and take necessary precautions to avoid heat-related illnesses.

—Salar News

GEARING UP FOR LS POLLS

Congress Bengaluru Central Lok Sabha candidate Mansoor Ali Khan interacts with an elderly woman in CV Raman Nagar on Thursday **PHOTO: SALAR**

Congress MP DK Suresh has assets worth ₹593cr

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Incumbent MP DK Suresh, who was the only Congress candidate to win 2019 Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka, on Thursday filed his nomination from Bangaluru Rural constituency upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

The 57-year-old younger brother of Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has assets valued at Rs 593 crore, a 75 per cent increase in the last five years. Suresh had declared assets of Rs 339 crore before the 2019 general elections.

Shivakumar praised Suresh's efforts during the Covid-19 for his invaluable contributions to the welfare of the community. Speaking at a gathering Shivakumar commended Suresh's initiatives in procuring and distributing essential supplies, securing funds for MGNREGA, and implementing developmental projects worth Rs 540 crores in Bengaluru Rural. "We have fought many elections against the Deve Gowda family. We have got a woman elected against Deve Gowda. I have faced Kumaraswamy in an election. Suresh had won an election against Anita Kumaraswamy, who was the joint candidate of BJP and JDS," he said.

"DK Suresh works continuously for the development of the constituency and the progress of the district. If you win him as your representative and send him to Delhi, he will work as our voice," said Chief Minister Siddaramiah.

Suresh defeated former MLA Anitha Kumaraswamy in the 2013 after her husband and former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy resigned from Lok Sabha.

Prajwal Revanna, the lone JD(S) MP in the State who has been renominated from Hassan Lok Sabha seat, has declared assets worth Rs 40.85 crore, which is a four-fold increase from 2019, according to his election affidavit. The 34-year-old sitting MP has movable assets worth Rs 5.45 crore including deposits, investments, loans given to others and jewellery.

BJP-JD(S) combine has fielded noted cardiac surgeon CN Manjunath from Bengaluru Rural constituency, who is the son-in-law of former prime minister HD Deve Gowda and brother-in-law of former chief minister and Kumaraswamy, in this Vokkaliga-dominated segment.

—Salar News

DK Suresh filed nomination from Bengaluru Rural **PHOTO: X/@DKSureshINC**

Reporter abuses, slaps female scribe

Bengaluru, 28 March

A female journalist from Press Trust of India (PTI) was verbally abused and physical assault by news agency ANI reporter on Thursday. The altercation, captured on camera and shared from PTI's official handle shows the woman reporter, and ANI reporter Raghavendra engaged in a heated argument after which he slapped her multiple times before being restrained by bystanders. The incident occurred during a press conference held by Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in Bengaluru on Thursday. PTI condemned the "abominable behaviour" of the ANI reporter. An FIR is being filed, and PTI intends to lodge a complaint with the National Commission for Women.

—Salar News

12 held for rowdy's murder in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

A rowdy-sheeter was hacked to death in a Kammanahalli hotel on Wednesday after which police arrested 12 individuals including two history-sheeters.

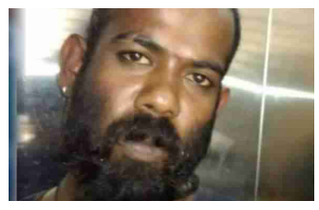
The victim Dinesh Barbara was killed by a gang as revenge for the past murders. Among the arrested were three people who had recently been released on bail.

Dinesh, 34, a resident of Kothanur, had over 16 warrants pending against him.

On Wednesday afternoon, Dinesh along with a group of friends entered an OYO hotel to book rooms. When the receptionist demanded cash, his friends went out to withdraw cash from the ATM. Dinesh was sitting on the sofa in the lounge. Suddenly, the gang entered the hotel and killed him.

He died on the spot. The police visited the spot and launched formed four special teams to arrest the 12 men. They arrested within 24 hours.

Reportedly, Dinesh planned another rowdy-sheeter Dileep's murder. Dinesh and his men visited a hotel to plan the murder. However, some members within Dinesh's gang were in contact with Dileep and informed him about it. In return, Dileep orchestrated Dinesh's murder.



Dinesh Barbara **PHOTO: SALAR**

Dinesh was involved in the killing of another rowdy-sheeter named Palani in KG Halli police station limits. He was also one of the accused in 2014 murder case of Vijay Kumar, also known as Kavala, a notorious underworld gangster. Vijay brutally hacked to death by Dinesh's former associate and five accomplices near the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border and Santoshi Bai and her daughter-in-law Latha Dinesh,were discovered murdered with their throats slit at their residence in 2016. In 2017, he was accused of attempting to kidnap the personal assistant of the then Opposition leader in the Legislative Council.

—Salar News

HAL CONDUCTS FIRST FLIGHT OF LCA TEJAS MK1A

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

The first aircraft LA5033 of the Tejas Mk1A series successfully soared in the sky after taking off from the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) facility in Bengaluru on Thursday, the public sector aerospace and defence company said.

According to HAL, the Tejas Mk1A aircraft did a successful sortie with a flying time of 18 minutes. The plane was piloted by Chief Test Pilot Group Captain KK Venugopal (Retired). "HAL achieved this significant production milestone with concurrent design and development amid major supply chain challenges in the global geopolitical environment, subsequent to the contract signature in February 2021," HAL Chief Managing Director CB Ananthakrishnan said."The Tejas Mk1A will have an advanced electronic RADAR, warfare and communication systems, additional combat capability and improved maintenance features," HAL said.

HAL had signed a Transfer of Technology agreement with CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (CSIR-NAL) on 8 November, 2023.

—PTI

City girl strikes gold in Gymnastics Championship

SAPTARSHI
BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Riyanshi Patnaik from St Patrick School in City has bagged a gold medal at National Aerobic Gymnastics Championship in Jammu and Kashmir. Dominating the national development (girls') single category, the 13-year-old replicated her success from the previous edition of the tournament held in Karnataka.

The three-day national championship, which concluded on 26 March, was organised by Gymnastics Association of J&K, J&K Sports Council and Gymnastics Federation of India. As many as 350 gymnasts from 20 states, including 60 from Karnataka, displayed their aerobic prowess.

Riyanshi started taking up gymnastics when she was three **PHOTO: SALAR**

- Eyeing for world championships, Riyanshi said, "My goal is to represent India on the world stage."Deepankar Patnaik, her father, said that she dedicates a minimum of 2 hours daily to training

Eyeing for world championships, Riyanshi said, "My goal is to represent India on the world stage."

Riyanshi started taking up gymnastics when she was three years old. "My parents are the biggest support to achieve my goals," said Riyanshi, who has won several medals in national meets.

Deepankar Patnaik, Riyanshi's father, told **Salar News** that she dedicates a minimum of two hours daily to training. "She is deeply passionate about her pursuits and diligently works towards her objectives," Deepankar said.

Her head coach, Shivraj GN, expressed confidence in Riyanshi's abilities. "We were optimistic about her success in the championship in Jammu and Kashmir. We are planning to provide her advanced level of training to propel her to greater heights."

However, the escalating costs of training pose a challenge to Riyanshi's aspirations. "Though a few private centres have come up in the City, it is difficult for us middle-class parents to afford the sport. I appeal to the State government to financially help budding talents reach newer heights,'' Deepnakar said.

—Salar News

GP STAFF BOOKED FOR MISUSING DRINKING WATER

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 28 MARCH

As the drought woes persist in Chikkamagaluru district, exacerbating the already dire situation for farmers and residents, a disturbing incident has come to light.

A case has been registered against a Gram Panchayat development officer Eswaraiah, from Tarikere taluk's Lingadahalli village, for allegedly diverting drinking water meant for public use to a private garden. The case has been filed at the Lingadalli police station.

He facilitated the illegal supply of drinking water to his coffee estate over a span of three months. The water, drawn from Shanti Falls near Kemmannu Gundi, was allegedly diverted through a pipe intended for drinking water supply, causing discontent among locals residents.

—Salar News

Arnab, Niranjan booked for fake news about CM

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Republic TV owner Arnab Goswami and Republic Kannada editor Niranjan were booked in State for allegedly airing false news about Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. The case was registered at Bengaluru's SJ Park police station following a complaint filed by Congress leader Ravindra.

According to Ravindra's complaint, Republic Kannada broadcasted a news report claiming that traffic was halted on MG Road in City to make way for Siddaramaiah's vehicle, and that an ambulance got stuck in the traffic. However, Siddaramaiah was reportedly in Mysuru at the time, not Bengaluru.

Ravindra alleged that the channel aired false news ahead of the Lok Sabha elections to wrongly influence the public. The incident has sparked controversy and raised concerns about the spread of misinformation in the media, especially during elections.In 2020, Goswami, was arrested by Raigad Police in connection with the death of architect Anvay Naik, who died by suicide at his Alibaug farmhouse in 2018.

—Salar News

Arnab Goswami **PHOTO: X/@RTARNABOFFICIAL**

- The incident has sparked controversy and raised concerns about the spread of misinformation in the media, especially during elections

CITY TRADITION

Hot Cross Buns sweeten Good Friday

MEGHANA PRASAD
BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

For many in Bengaluru, Good Friday isn't just a day of solemn reflection; it's also a time for a sweet tradition – Hot Cross Buns. These spiced buns, filled with currants or raisins and topped with a cross of icing, serve as a delectable reminder of the Easter story.

This tradition arrived in Bengaluru during British rule, and local bakeries have embraced it wholeheartedly. Among the many bakeries in the City, three legendary ones – Albert Bakery, Thom's Bakery and Thomson's Bakery – stand out, each with a legacy of crafting these buns for generations.

Established in 1920, Albert Bakery in Frazer Town prides itself on using only the finest ingredients like Ceylon cinnamon and plump raisins, with no artificial flavours. "We have been following the same process since my great-grandfather's time," Mohammad Sabir, Managing Director and fourth-generation baker of Albert Bakery, told Salar News.

Hot Cross Buns are an integral part of Easter for Bengalureans **PHOTO: SALAR**

In Christianity, Good Friday marks the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, observed as a solemn day of reflection and fasting. Hot cross buns are a traditional treat on this day, with the cross symbolising the crucifixion and the spices representing those used in embalming Jesus.

The secret to making these cross buns lies in the slow fermentation process, which gives the buns a rich flavour and a soft, pillowy texture, said Binu Thomas, a co-owner of Thom's Bakery at Pulikeshi Nagar (Frazer Town). "We started making the Hot Cross Buns in 1972 and have never changed the recipe or the ingredients any time."

The cross buns dished out of Thomson's Bakery at Cox Town have a unique smoky flavour. "This is because we are using woodfired ovens," said CT Abraham, owner of the bakery which was started in 1932.

For Bengalureans, Hot Cross Buns are an integral part of Easter celebrations. "It's a tradition I cherish with my family every year," said Kokila Kumar, a regular at Albert Bakery.

Komal Thandani, a young customer at Thom's Bakery, said, "They are a delicious way to kick off Easter weekend, and they make great gifts. The aroma of these buns instantly takes me back to my childhood."

—Salar News

FIR lodged against BJP's Dilip Ghosh for remarks on Mamata

KOLKATA, 28 MARCH

A First Information Report has been lodged against senior BJP leader Dilip Ghosh at Durgapur Police Station for his remarks on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, an official said. Ghosh has been booked under IPC sections 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace) and 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman), he said. Ghosh, the former state BJP President, had apologised on Wednesday for his comments on Banerjee, which had triggered a political storm. The Election Commission has also issued a show-cause notice to Ghosh, prompted by a complaint by the ruling TMC, asking him to respond by 29 March.—*PTI*

Protests against BJP candidate: Kerala cops file 2 cases

KOLLAM, 28 MARCH

Police here have filed two cases against several people in connection with the protests faced by the BJP candidate for the Kollam Lok Sabha seat, G Krishnakumar, when he visited an educational institution in the district for canvassing. The cases were booked last night based on two complaints, one by a BJP member and another by ABVP activists, alleging unlawful assembly, rioting with weapons and causing hurt to members of both organisations by the accused persons. Police have booked seven persons for the offences of unlawful assembly, rioting, rioting with weapons, wrongful restraint, use of obscene words and songs and voluntarily causing hurt under the IPC. An officer of Kundara police station, where the cases have been filed, said that the accused people have been summoned for recording their statements. Actor-turned-politician Krishnakumar had strongly condemned the protests against him on Wednesday when he visited the campus of the Industrial Training Institute at Chandanthope here with works of the BJP and ABVP. —*PTI*

CPI(M) leaders' tombs defaced in Kerala

KANNUR, 28 MARCH

The memorial tombs of four late CPI(M) leaders, including former Kerala Chief Minister EK Nayanar, at the famous Payyambalam beach here, were found defaced on Thursday morning, prompting strong condemnation from the ruling party. In addition to Nayanar, the tombs of late CPI(M) state secretaries Chadayan Govindan and Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, as well as trade union leader O Bharathan, were found defaced, alleged party leaders. The Kannur Town police said that top officials had already left for the beach upon learning about the incident. Condemning the act, CPI(M) Kannur district secretary TV Rajesh said that it remains unclear who perpetrated the criminal act. However, he added that the tombs of leaders of other parties remained untouched. Visiting the area with senior party leaders, he alleged that the act was done purposefully to disrupt peace, especially during the election period. He urged the police to launch a probe to identify the culprits involved. —*PTI*

Punjab CM Bhagwnt Mann welcomes baby girl

CHANDIGARH, 28 MARCH

PPunjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and his wife Gurpreet Kaur were blessed with a baby girl on Thursday. Mann shared the news in a post on X. "The Almighty has given (me) the gift of a daughter. Both the mother and the baby are healthy," he said. In another post, the chief minister shared a picture of his new born daughter. Mann married Kaur in 2022 after he separated from his first wife in 2015. He has two children from his first marriage – a son and a daughter. —*PTI*

'Operation Lotus' underway in Punjab, alleges AAP

AAP claims its MLAs are being offered money by the BJP

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj PHOTO: PTI

- Senior AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj on Thursday alleged that 'Operation Lotus' has started in Punjab, a day after the party's lone Lok Sabha MP Sushil Kumar Rinku joined BJP.

Senior AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj on Thursday alleged that 'Operation Lotus' has started in Punjab, a day after the party's lone Lok Sabha MP Sushil Kumar Rinku joined BJP.

'Operation Lotus' is the term used by Opposition parties to describe what they call "poaching" of MLAs by BJP to topple governments.

Addressing a press conference here, Bharadwaj said AAP MLAs in Punjab had said on Wednesday that the majority of them were getting calls and being offered money, Y category security and tickets for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls to join BJP.

Bharadwaj also questioned Rinku's decision to join BJP.

"BJP stood fourth in (the 2022) Punjab (Assembly elections) after AAP, Shriomani Akali Dal and Congress. The question is why did Rinku join BJP. His tenure as Lok Sabha MP has also ended. BJP will also come fourth in the Jalandhar Lok Sabha polls," he said.

Rinku, who had been named as AAP's candidate from Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat, joined BJP on Wednesday along with the party's Jalandhar West MLA Sheetal Angural.

Rinku was a vocal critic of BJP in the Lok Sabha and was even suspended from the House for his unruly protests.

BJP is likely to field him in the Lok Sabha polls as it inducts a number of influential leaders from different political parties in Punjab to emerge as a strong force in the state that has 13 parliamentary constituencies.

On purported claims by banned outfit Sikhs For Justice Chief Gurpatwant Singh Pannun that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal met the group's representatives in New York in 2014, Bharadwaj said it's shameful that BJP and its trolls are taking a terrorist's allegations as "gospel truth".

"This shows the BJP is anti-national," the AAP leader said.

He also said the Centre is rattled by the governments of the US and Germany expressing concern over democracy in India and calling for a fair trial for Kejriwal.

Centre recently summoned US and German diplomats following their government's remarks on Kejriwal's arrest.

According to reports, a US State Department official had said that Washington "encouraged a fair, transparent and timely legal process for Chief Minister Kejriwal".

Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate last week in connection with the money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy. —*PTI*

EX-HARYANA MIN

India's richest woman Savitri Jindal quits Cong, joins BJP

CHANDIGARH, 28 MARCH

Savitri Jindal PHOTO: PTI

Former Haryana minister Savitri Jindal quit Congress and joined BJP on Thursday, days after her son and industrialist Naveen Jindal left the party to join the saffron outfit.

The 84-year-old Savitri Jindal joined the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at an event in Hisar. She is India's richest woman with net worth of USD 3,320 crore. She joined BJP in presence of Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, former chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar and other BJP leaders.

Announcing her decision to quit Congress on a social media post late Wednesday night, she said, "I represented the people of Hisar for 10 years as an MLA and have served Haryana state selflessly as a minister. The people of Hisar are my family and on the advice of my family, I am resigning from the primary membership of Congress today".

Savitri was listed as the richest woman in the country by Forbes India this year.

According to the Forbes list of the 10 richest women in India, Savitri, who is the wife of late industrialist and former minister OP Jindal, has a net worth of USD 29.1 billion.

Savitri was a minister in the previous Bhupinder Singh Hooda led Congress government in Haryana. In 2014, she lost to BJP's Dr Kamal Gupta from Hisar. Gupta is currently a minister in the Saini government. Naveen, who represented Kurukshetra constituency in Lok Sabha from 2004-14 as a Congress MP, had quit the the party on Sunday, and said he wants to contribute to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's agenda of 'Viksit Bharat'. He has been named as BJP candidate from Kurukshetra. —*PTI*

Where are the jobs: Priyanka attacks Centre

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Priyanka Gandhi PHOTO: PTI

- Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday flagged developmental issues such as unemployment, price rise and farmers' plight

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday flagged developmental issues such as unemployment, price rise and farmers' plight, as she questioned the BJP-led government under her party's 'Mere Vikas Ka Do Hisaab' campaign for the Lok Sabha polls.

She posed questions to the Modi government and asked it to give an account of development during its tenure of 10 years. "Why are 83 per cent of the total unemployed in the country youth? Where are the 2 crore jobs annually? Why are 30 lakh government posts vacant in the country? Why is every exam paper leaked?" she said, attacking the government on youth issues.

She alleged that corporate's Rs 16 lakh crore has been "waived off" and asked why are farmers committing suicide due to debt. "When will farmers' income double? When will farmers get MSP?" the Congress general secretary said. Why is there no proper participation of our Dalits, backward classes, tribals, minorities and poor upper castes in the posts and resources of the country, she asked.

"Why is inflation at its peak today? Why is it difficult to run a household? Why are common people not able to manage their families?" Priyanka Gandhi said. —*PTI*

VARUN GANDHI PENS NOTE FOR PEOPLE OF PILIBHIT

LUCKNOW, 28 MARCH

Denied a ticket from Pilibhit Lok Sabha seat, BJP MP Varun Gandhi on Thursday wrote an emotional letter to the people of his constituency in which he asserted that his relationship with them will remain intact till his last breath. Sharing the letter on X, he said, his relationship with Pilibhit is one of love and trust which is far above any political calculations. BJP has fielded Uttar Pradesh Public Works Minister Jitin Prasada from Pilibhit replacing Gandhi, who has been vocal against his own government several times on the issue of inflation and unemployment.

Recounting his association with the constituency, he said "Today, when I am writing this letter, countless memories have made me emotional. I remember that little three-year-old child who came to Pilibhit for the first time in 1983 holding the fingers of his mother." —*PTI*

Mahua Moitra skips ED summons, campaigns in WB's Krishnanagar

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

TMC leader Mahua Moitra PHOTO: PTI

TMC leader Mahua Moitra campaigned in her Krishnanagar constituency of West Bengal on Thursday, giving a miss to the Enforcement Directorate summons that asked her to appear for questioning at the ED office in New Delhi.

The probe agency had issued fresh summons to Moitra and Dubai-based businessman Darshan Hiranandani for questioning in a Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) contravention case.

Addressing reporters during campaigning in Nadia's Kaliaganj, she said: "The ED will do its job, and I will do mine, which is to continue with my campaign."

The 49-year-old Trinamool Congress leader was called for questioning twice earlier by the central agency, but she did not depose citing official work and sought deferment of the notice.

Moitra, who was expelled from the Lok Sabha in December for "unethical conduct", has been renominated by her party from West Bengal's Krishnanagar seat in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Meanwhile, reacting to Moitra's decision to skip the summons, BJP leader Rahul Sinha referred to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who was recently arrested by the ED in connection with a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy.

"She is trying to defy the central probe agency, but she must not forget what happened to Arvind Kejriwal, who had ignored nine summons by the ED. Her decision to skip the summons only proves that the ED is moving in the right direction," Sinha claimed. —*PTI*

BATTLE OF THE BIGGIES

BJP, LDF keen to break into Cong stronghold in Thiruvananthapuram

T'PURAM, 28 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Trying his luck for the fourth term, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor is facing a strong contest in the Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha constituency for the 26 April polls, with BJP making its best attempt to win the seat by fielding Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar and the ruling Left putting forward its popular face and former MP Pannyan Raveendran.

While Congress is completely relying on the influence of Tharoor, BJP is hoping that Chandrasekhar, a technocrat-turned politician, can win the hearts of the people, ensuring the overall development of the constituency where the party finished second in the previous two elections.

At the same time, the CPI(M)-led LDF believes that the simple and easily accessible image of Pannyan, as he is popularly known in the state, will help him influence the voters and wrest the constituency back, defeating both Congress and BJP.

As the PTI team visited the famous All Saints' College, a college for women, in the state capital, Tharoor was reaching out to the students, telling them about the role played by the Indian National Congress in India's freedom struggle.

When the PTI team entered into the election committee office of the NDA candidate in Neyyattinkara, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, dressed in a blue kurta, was listening to the suggestions of party workers from different assembly constituencies.

Along with door-to-door campaigns, Chandrasekhar is also focussing on special events like seminars, meetings with people, and press conferences to get his points across in the Hindu-dominated constituency. LDF candidate Pannyan, who was busy campaigning in Parassala constituency, some 40 kilometers away from the city, had rushed to take part in a fast-breaking ceremony organised by the Jamaat-e-Islami in Thiruvananthapuram city. —*PTI*

GOA AAP'S CHIEF, THREE OTHERS QUESTIONED BY ED

PANAJI, 28 MARCH

Aam Aadmi Party's Goa unit President Amit Palekar and three others appeared before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday for questioning in connection with a money laundering case.

Sources said all four of them were called for questioning in connection with the money laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, in which Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and some other AAP leaders have been arrested. The ED had summoned Palekar, AAP leader Ramrao Wagh and two others - Dattaprasad Naik and Ashok Naik for questioning.

Dattaprasad and Ashok are leaders of the Bhandari community in Goa.

Palekar arrived at the ED office here at 12.10pm, while the three others reached there before him at 11.15am. —*PTI*

Centre extends AFSPA in AP, Nagaland districts

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, under which an area is declared as "disturbed" for the convenience of security forces, has been extended in three districts of Arunachal Pradesh, eight districts of Nagaland and some other areas for six more months after a review of the law and order situation in these two northeastern states.

In a notification, the Union Home Ministry said the Central government in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 had declared the Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts in Arunachal Pradesh and the areas falling within the jurisdiction of Namsai, Mahadevpur and Chowkham police stations in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering Assam as "disturbed area" on 26 September, 2023.

In a separate notification, the Home Ministry also said that the central government in exercise of the powers conferred by AFSPA had declared eight districts and 21 police stations in five other districts of Nagaland as 'disturbed area' for a period of six months with effect from 1 October, 2023.

It said a further review of the law-and-order situation in Nagaland has been undertaken and after that a decision has been taken to declare as 'disturbed area' under the AFSPA for six more months in eight districts of the state and areas falling under 21 police stations. —*PTI*

Hurriyat Conference chief allegedly under house arrest

SRINAGAR, 28 MARCH

Mirwaiz Umar Farooq PHOTO: PTI

A religious organisation headed by Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on Thursday claimed he has been placed under house arrest.

"The Mirwaiz has been put under house arrest by the authorities ahead of his sermon that he was scheduled to deliver at Aali Masjid in the city today," Anjjuman Auqaf Jamia Masjid said in a statement. However, officials here refused to comment on the claim of Mirwaiz's house arrest. The Mirwaiz was released from house detention in September last year - more than four years after he was placed under house arrest in the wake of abrogation of Article 370 by the Centre in August 2019. The authorities again placed curbs on his movement in the first week of October and prevented him from attending any religious gatherings, including Friday prayers at Jamia Masjid. The Mirwaiz was again allowed to attend Friday prayers and other religious congregations a week ahead of the Ramzan fasting month. —*PTI*

POLITICAL COMEBACK FOR HERO NO. 1

Govinda joins Shinde-led Shiv Sena

MUMBAI, 28 MARCH

Actor Govinda joins Shiv Sena (Shinde faction) in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, in Mumbai PHOTO: PTI

Bollywood actor Govinda, a mass entertainer of the 1990s who is known for his excellent comic timing and epic dance steps, on Thursday joined the ruling Shiv Sena in Mumbai, making a comeback in politics after a 14-year hiatus.

Former Congress Lok Sabha MP joined the Shiv Sena in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde at the time of election season. Govinda, who gave multiple superhit films in his decades-long career, made a blockbuster entry in electoral politics in 2004. That year, the "Hero No. 1" actor emerged as a "giant killer" when, as the Congress candidate, he defeated BJP stalwart Ram Naik in the Mumbai North Lok Sabha seat.

Shinde welcomed the 60-year-old actor into his party, saying he was a popular figure in all sections of society. Speaking on the occasion, an emotional Govinda, who started his acting career in the 1980s and whose films were massy family entertainers, said after his first stint in politics from 2004 to 2009, he never felt he would again come back to the same field.

"The veteran actor, whose full name is Govinda Ahuja, said he would work in the art and culture field if given a chance. Mumbai looks more beautiful and developed since Shinde has become CM, he remarked after his re-entry into politics, albeit under the banner of a different political party, which comes at a time when the country is in the midst of Lok Sabha polls. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Woman assaulted over water usage during Holi

THANE, 28 MARCH

A 27-year-old woman was allegedly attacked following an altercation over using water during Holi celebrations in a housing complex at Taloja in Navi Mumbai, police said. The victim approached the watchman of the housing society and expressed concern over the wastage of water during the Holi celebrations on Monday. She requested him to advise others to use water sparingly. However, this led to her confrontation with a woman and her son residing there, they said. Her altercation with the mother-son duo, aged 50 and 24 respectively, turned serious and the accused assaulted the victim, leaving her severely injured, the police said. —*PTI*

Trenches dug at Bhojshala as ASI survey continues

DHAR, MARCH 28

The court-mandated Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) survey at the contentious Bhojshala/ Kamal Maula Mosque complex in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district continued on the seventh day on Thursday, for which some trenches have been dug at the site, people linked to the exercise said.Ashish Goyal and Gopal Sharma representing the Hindu community and a leader of the Muslim community, Abdul Samad, were present with the ASI team during the survey.Samad, who is also the president of the Maulana Kamal Welfare society, said, "We have said earlier also that the Muslim community is not against the ongoing survey. We are against the inclusion of those things in the survey which were kept inside the complex after 2003. We have registered our objections on certain issues before the survey team as it is our right."—*PTI*

Pro-Khalistani graffiti found at Delhi metro stn

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Pro-Khalistan graffiti was found on a pillar of Punjabi Bagh metro station in west Delhi on Thursday morning, police said. An First Information Report (FIR) has been registered in connection with the matter, they said. Police received a call around 9.30am about the graffiti on the pillar of Punjabi Bagh metro station, an officer said. Local police inspected the spot and found "Delhi Banega Khalistan" written on the pillar with paint. The graffiti had been painted over in yellow. An FIR has been filed, the officer said.—*PTI*

3 injured as bomb hurled in Odisha's Sambalpur, 1 held

SAMBALPUR, 27 MARCH

At least three people were injured after a crude bomb was hurled in Sambalpur city of Odisha, and an accused was arrested in this connection, police said on Wednesday. The incident took place at Pirbaba Chhak in the Town Police Station area on Tuesday night when the accused hurled a crude bomb that hit a parked motorcycle, with the splinters injuring three persons standing near the two-wheeler, a senior officer said. "The injured persons people are out of danger. The situation is under control and a detailed probe is underway. One accused has been arrested," Sambalpur Superintendent of Police Mukesh Kumar Bhamoo told reporters. Sambalpur district collector Akshay Sunil Agarwal appealed to people to maintain peace and not believe in fake news circulated on social media."The situation is under control and police are probing the incident.," the collector said in a video message.Bhamoo and Northen range IG Himansi Lal, in a joint statement, said it was a "r matter of personal revenge."—*PTI*

India and China talk on resolving issues on LAC

Both sides agreed to keep diplomatic, military channels open

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The 29th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs has been held and the two sides had an in-depth exchange of views on how to achieve "complete disengagement" and resolve the remaining issues along the line of actual control (LAC), the MEA said on Thursday.

The key meeting was held in Beijing on 27 March, it said in a statement.

"The two sides had an in-depth exchange of views on how to achieve complete disengagement and resolve the remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Western Sector of India-China border areas," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

Joint Secretary (East Asia) from the MEA led the Indian delegation.

The Chinese delegation was led by Director General of the Boundary and Oceanic Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the statement said.

"In the interim, both sides agreed to maintain regular contact through diplomatic and military channels and on the need to uphold peace and tranquility on the ground in the border areas in accordance with existing bilateral agreements and protocols," it said.

The 28th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs was held on 30 November last year.

—*PTI*

The meeting was between MEA Joint Secretary and Oceanic Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

- The key meeting was held in Beijing on 27 March, it said in a statement. Joint Secretary (East Asia) from the MEA led the Indian delegation

INDIA'S BORDERS TOTALLY SECURED SAYS, RAJNATH

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said India and its borders are "totally secure" and the people of the country should have full faith in the armed forces.

During a fireside chat on the concluding day of the Times Now Summit here, while responding to a question on the criticism of the Agniveer scheme, the minister said such questions have "no standing" and underlined that everyone will accept that the armed forces should have a young profile.

Indian and Chinese troops are locked in an over three-and-half-year-long confrontation at certain friction points in eastern Ladakh even as the two sides completed disengagement from several areas following extensive diplomatic and military talks. The eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted on 5 May , 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong lake area. —*PTI*

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

CCTV footage shows two masked assailants entering Nanakmatta Gurdwara and shot Kar Seva Pramukh Baba Tarsem Singh PHOTO: PTI

Dera Karseva chief of U'khand gurdwara killed

DEHRADUN/RUDRAPUR, 28 MARCH

The Dera Karseva chief of the Nanakmatta Sahib Gurdwara in Uttarakhand was shot dead within the premises of the shrine by two motorcycle-borne assailants early Thursday, police said.

Baba Tarsem Singh was rushed to a hospital in Khatima where he died during treatment, Udham Singh Nagar Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Manju Nath told reporters.

"We have clear (CCTV camera) videos of the assailants. They are both Sikhs," he said and added that they fled after the incident.

The Nanakmatta Sahib Gurdwara is a revered Sikh shrine located on the Rudrapur-Tanakpur route in Udham Singh Nagar district of the state.

In CCTV camera footage, the assailants were seen entering the gurdwara on a motorcycle around 6:15am and shooting at Singh with a rifle, Nath said and added that the shooter was riding pillion.

"Two rounds were fired at Singh who was sitting on a chair. The first shot was fired from the front and the other from the back. Singh immediately fell on the ground," the SSP said.

Eight police teams have been mobilised to apprehend the dera karseva chief's attackers, he said.

Terming the incident "serious", Uttarakhand Director General of Police (DGP) Abhinav Kumar said a special investigation team (SIT) comprising personnel of the Special Task Force and local police has been constituted to look into the incident

"If there is a conspiracy behind the incident, it will be unravelled. The help of central agencies will also be taken for this," he said and added that "we will nab the assailants soon". —*PTI*

- The Nanakmatta Sahib Gurdwara is a revered Sikh shrine located on the Rudrapur-Tanakpur route in Udham Singh Nagar district of the state. In CCTV camera footage, the assailants were seen shooting at Singh with a rifle

MGNREGS gets hike of 4-10 pc in different states

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme have been revised, with hikes ranging between four and 10 per cent for different states.

Haryana has the highest wage rate for unskilled workers under the scheme at Rs 374 a day, while Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland have the lowest at Rs 234, according to a notification.

The wage rate in three panchayats of Sikkim -- Gnathang, Lachung and Lachen -- is Rs 374 a day.

The wage revision under the scheme was notified by the Union rural development ministry on 27 March after clearance from the Election Commission as the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is in force for the Lok Sabha polls.

The increases have been made on the 2023 wage rates under scheme that is aimed at for enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

The hike in the wage rate in Goa was highest in the country at Rs 34 and per day payment now stands at Rs 356 in the state, according to the notification. In Andhra Pradesh, it was increased by Rs 28 a day and the wage rate is now Rs 300.

PHOTO: PTI

The increase for Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand was the lowest at Rs 7 and the wage rate in both the states is Rs 237 a day to workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

The wage rate in West Bengal has been increased to Rs 250 (increase of Rs 13), in Tamil Nadu to Rs 319 (increase of Rs 25), in Telangana to Rs 300 (increase of Rs 28) and in Bihar to Rs 228 (increase of Rs 17).

Though Haryana tops in terms of wage rate, the increase is only around 4 per cent. —*PTI*

Good Friday, Easter Sunday declared holiday in Manipur

IMPHAL, 28 MARCH

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Rajya Sabha MP Prakash Javadekar on Thursday said that the Manipur government has issued notification that on 29 March (Good Friday) and 31 March (Easter Sunday) there would be a holiday.

"Manipur Government has issued notification that tomorrow, 29th Good Friday and 31st Easter Sunday will be holidays," Prakash Javadekar posted on X.

The BJP leader alleged that the grand old party was "raking up falsehoods" as it has no issues to raise.

"Congress has no issues. Therefore, they are raking up falsehoods. Congress and communists should now tell when they will condemn Hamas attacks and terror attacks in Russia," he added.

A war of words broke out between the Congress and the BJP in Kerala after the Manipur government was earlier ordered to declare Good Friday and Easter Sunday as working days.

"I am shocked. As you know, in our country, we've built a system of mutual respect amongst religions and faiths and particularly respect that people deserve for their special days according to their religious traditions," Tharoor told reporters on Thursday.

"It is surprising and worrying. It has come in the aftermath of a devastating year in Manipur, where violence happened. Amid all this, to hurt sentiment of one community is a matter of grave concern. I do believe that the Government of India should intervene and get this withdrawn," he added. —*ANI*

OFFICIAL 2-DAY VISIT

Ukraine Foreign Minister to work towards 'peace formula' in India

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Ukrainian Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba who arrived in India on Thursday, said that his two-day official visit will look to boost bilateral ties between the two countries and build on the dialogue between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"I began my visit to New Delhi upon @DrSJaishankar's invitation. The Ukrainian-Indian cooperation is important and we will be reinvigorating ties. Building on the dialogue between @ZelenskyyUa and @NarendraModi, we will pay specific attention to the Peace Formula," Kuleba said in a post on X.

During Kuleba's visit he will discuss bilateral ties as well as cooperation on regional and global issues of mutual interest.Official engagements of the visiting leader include meetings with External Affairs Minister Jaishankar, Deputy National Security Advisor Vikram Misri to discuss matters pertaining to the bilateral partnership and cooperation on regional and global issues of mutual interest according to the Ministry of External Affairs.Kuleba is also expected to interact with the business community in India.The visit comes days after a telephonic conversation between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on 20 March. —*ANI*

Ukrainian Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba has arrived in India on his two day visit Thursday to boost bilateral ties with India PHOTO: PTI

TEEN STABBED FOR NOT SHOWING ANSWER IN EXAM

THANE, 28 MARCH

Three students allegedly stabbed their classmate after he refused to show his answer-sheet to them during a written examination of Class 10 in Bhiwandi town of Maharashtra's Thane district, police said on Thursday.

Following the incident that took place on Tuesday at a school after the examination, the injured student was admitted to a local hospital, they said.

"During the SSC exams, the victim refused to show his answer sheet to the accused students during the examination. Enraged by this, the trio caught hold of him as soon as he came out of the exam hall and thrashed him. He suffered injuries and was hospitalised," a police official said. —*PTI*

Skyroot test fires stage 2 of Vikram-1 rocket

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Space start-up Skyroot on Thursday said it has test-fired the stage-2 of the Vikram-1 rocket, which is expected to place a satellite in orbit later this year.

The stage-2 of the Vikram-1 launch vehicle, called Kalam-250, is a high-strength carbon composite motor that will carry the rocket from the atmospheric phase to the deep vacuum of outer space, according to a statement issued by the company.

The test-firing of Kalam-250, which took place at the propulsion test bed at the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh, lasted for 85 seconds and recorded a peak sea-level thrust of 186 kilonewtons (kN), which will translate into a fully-expanded vacuum thrust of around 235 kN in flight.

"This is a significant milestone for the Indian space industry, marking the successful test of the largest propulsion system ever designed and manufactured by the Indian private sector, and the first carbon-composite-built motor tested at the ISRO," Pawan Chandana, co-founder and CEO of Hyderabad-based Skyroot Aerospace, said.

PHOTO: SKYROOT

"All test parameters are within expected bounds and this achievement takes us another step closer to the upcoming orbital launch of the Vikram-1 rocket," he added.

Kalam-250 is a high-strength carbon composite rocket motor, which uses solid fuel and a high-performance ethylene-propylene-diene terpolymers (EPDM) thermal protection system (TPS).

The stage-2 houses a carbon ablative flex nozzle, along with high-precision electro-mechanical actuators, for thrust vector control of the vehicle, which helps the rocket achieve the desired trajectory. —*PTI*

TALE OF COURAGE

NGO staffer lost his hands, not his will

KOTA, 28 MARCH

From grazing cattle in Uttarakhand to managing an NGO office in Rajasthan, 58-year-old Devkinandan Sharma has come a long way, despite losing both his arms at the age of 18.

At Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti's office in Kota, Sharma does paperwork and maintains records digitally, using only his toes.

"Pinning papers is a difficult task for me as it takes too much effort and time," he says.

Unlike traditional desk setups, Sharma innovatively places a wooden board at his feet, transforming it into his workspace where he manages all the paperwork. Alongside these duties, he also works on a computer effortlessly maneuvering the mouse and keyboard with his toes on the same wooden board.

Sharma says he was a bright student in school and always dreamt of having a job where he handled paperwork.

"I was very sharp in Maths and English and it was my dream to get a job where I could sign and write papers in the office. This dream shattered in my 8th class when one day in 1981, I got a high power electric shock while working as a contractual wage labourer and I lost both my arms," Sharma, who was born and brought up in Nainital's Shilalekh village, recounts.

Upon returning home from the hospital, Sharma says he was termed "useless" by the villagers, who then gave him the task of grazing cattle in the forest. He used that time to practise writing by securing a tree twig between his toe thumb and middle toe.

After six months of regular practice, one day he drew a lotus flower on the ground and spelled it in Hindi, "kamal". This gave him the confidence to transition to practising on paper with a pen held between his toes. It took him eight months of relentless effort to finally master this art of writing on a paper with his toes.

"I wrote my first letter with a pen held between my toes to my brother who was then posted in Almora, Uttarakhand. Surprised by this, he encouraged me to resume studies," Sharma says.

He took his brother's advice and completed his senior secondary education in 1986.

The same year, a camp for physically challenged people was organised in Ranikhet, Uttarakhand, where Sharma met social workers Prassana and her husband MC Bhandari, founders of Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti in Kota.

The couple was extremely impressed with Sharma's ability to write with his toes and asked him to accompany them here. Sharma was initially offered the job of a storekeeper in the NGO here and in 2001, he was promoted to the post of manager.

Sharma lives in Kota with his wife, an ASHA worker, and son, who is a physiotherapist. His daughter is married and is a homemaker. —*PTI*

58-year-old Devkinandan Sharma has come a long way, despite losing his hands at 18. He now writes with his toes PHOTO: PTI

WORLD'S BIGGEST SNAKE

The world's largest snake named Ana Julia has been found dead in the Brazilian Amazon Rainforest just weeks after it was discovered. The 26-foot northern green anaconda weighed around 440lbs - or 31 stone - and had a head the same size as a human's

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/ FREEKVONK

Bihar battles Summer, climate change & diseases

Far from the world of scientists studying climate change, the twin whammies of altered rainfall patterns and rising temperatures are being felt every day in villages such as Sher in Bihar where lymphatic filariasis and other neglected tropical diseases lurk in dank corners.

Climate change, which brings with it floods and droughts, is also leading to more mosquitoes and sandflies and therefore a spike in diseases such as lymphatic filariasis, commonly known as elephantiasis, dengue and visceral leishmaniasis (VL) or kala azar. As the summer sets in, so does the threat of transmission of these diseases with the heat creating fertile breeding grounds for the vectors.

"Climate change is fundamentally altering vector ecology, favouring the survival and reproduction of disease carrying vectors like mosquitoes and sandflies," said Dr Bhupendra Tripathi, a New Delhi-based scientist.

"This phenomenon extends their range and boosts their population densities, thus expanding vector habitats. Consequently, previously unaffected regions are now susceptible to vector-borne diseases such as LF and VL, with instances emerging in places like Uttarakhand," the MD and deputy director, Infectious Diseases and Vaccine Delivery, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, India Country Office.

Bihar's Sher village is testament that the fears of scientists and other experts are very real.

Walking through the labyrinthine lanes of the village, Kusum Begum is tasked with not just distributing medicines to combat LF, a debilitating disease caused by parasitic worms transmitted to humans through infected mosquitoes, but also increasing awareness.

"Climate change is making our battle against diseases like lymphatic filariasis even more challenging. We must act swiftly to mitigate these threats," Kusum said.

Zohra Begum (left) a Lymphatic Filariasis patient, shows her leg to a social worker who spreads awareness about prevention of the disease, at Sher village in Gopalganj district, Bihar ***PHOTO: PTI***

Shanti Devi, a community leader in Mugal Biracha village in Gopalganj district, has taken charge of spreading awareness on disease prevention and climate resilience.

"We must arm ourselves with knowledge on protecting against mosquito bites and understand the importance of curbing disease spread. Because we don't know when the situation will worsen," she said.

Bihar is likely to witness hotter summers and scantier rainfall in the next two decades. This may pose greater health risks with more severe heat waves and an "exponential" rise in vector-borne diseases, according to a recent submission before the state assembly by the Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (DEFCC) which cited a report of the Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB).

Underscoring the urgency of addressing the impact of climate change, Parmeshwar Prasad, Additional Director and Bihar Programme Officer of Lymphatic Filariasis, said India is on way to achieving its target of eradication by 2027 but the challenges are plenty.

VL is caused by infection with leishmania parasites that are transmitted by the bite of sandflies.

"Integrating climate change adaptation strategies into NTD control and elimination efforts requires a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates advanced modelling techniques, anticipatory planning, and adaptation of existing control measures. By doing so, we can better prepare for and mitigate the impacts of climate change on NTD burden, ultimately advancing towards the goal of eliminating these diseases in affected communities," he said.

Projections of shifting rainfall patterns in Bihar and soaring temperatures paint a grim picture, underscoring the urgent need for action. Higher temperatures could lead to an exponential rise of vector-borne diseases.

Fourteen of the 50 districts, including Muzaffarpur and Gopalganj, are considered most vulnerable to climate change in India are in Bihar, said BSPCB chairperson Devendra Kumar Shukla.

"Only through collective action can we safeguard the health and well-being of our communities," he said.

Community meetings are held regularly to educate residents on the importance of sanitation and proper waste disposal in reducing mosquito breeding sites.

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a diverse group of conditions caused by a variety of pathogens (including viruses, bacteria, parasites, fungi and toxins) and associated with devastating health, social and economic consequences.

The World Health Organization recognises 20 neglected tropical diseases, of which 12 are present in India. The NTDs most prevalent in India are LF, VL, leptospirosis, leprosy, rabies, soil-transmitted helminthiasis, and dengue.

—PTI

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Global water crisis fuelling more conflicts, UN report

Increasing global water scarcity is fuelling more conflicts and contributing to instability, the United Nations warns in a new report, which says access to clean water is critical to promoting peace.

The UN World Water Development Report 2024, said 2.2 billion people worldwide have no access to clean drinking water and 3.5 billion people lack access to safely managed sanitation.

Girls and women are the first victims of a lack of water, said the report, published by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), especially in rural areas where they have the primary responsibility of collecting supplies.

Spending several hours a day on fetching water, coupled with a lack of safe sanitation, is a contributing factor to girls dropping out of school.

"Water shortages not only fan the flames of geopolitical tensions but also pose a threat to fundamental rights as a whole, for example, by considerably undermining the position of girls and women," UNESCO Chief Audrey Azoulay said.

While the report did not examine specific current conflicts, Israel has severely restricted access to fresh, clean water during its war on Gaza.

UN agencies have long warned that not only are children and women at grave risk of thirst and starvation, but the lack of clean water also has disrupted medical treatment and hygiene.

> The lack of water security drives migration, and displaced people strain resources in locations where they settle. The report cited a study in Somalia that indicated a 200 percent increase in gender-based violence against a group of displaced people

The lack of water security drives migration, and displaced people strain resources in locations where they settle. The report cited a study in Somalia that indicated a 200 percent increase in gender-based violence against a group of displaced people.

At least 10 percent of global migration is linked to water stress as the world faces a more erratic climate, the researchers found.

The report also said: "Global warming is projected to ... further increase the frequency and severity of droughts and floods, with more wet and very dry weather and climate events."

Titled Water for Prosperity and Peace, the report found that roughly half of the world's population is experiencing severe water scarcity with some areas lacking water almost year-round.Much of the consequences are felt in poorer countries, which find it harder to adapt. The report estimated that it would cost $114bn annually to provide safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in 140 low- to middle-income countries.

Quentin Graft from Water Justice Hub, a UNESCO affiliate, told Al Jazeera: "It's not just a water problem for people in Syria. It's not just a water problem for people in Sudan. ... It's a water problem for all of us because we grow our food with freshwater whether it's irrigated or whether it's rain-fed, and when you have climate change on top of an already existing water crisis, then we have an inability to feed ourselves."

While 153 countries share water resources, only 24 have signed onto cooperation agreements covering all of their shared water, UN chief Antonio Guterres said in a statement marking World Water Day on Friday.

More than 60 percent of all freshwater resources are shared by two or more countries, including major rivers like the Rhine and Danube in Europe, the Mekong in Asia, the Nile in Africa and the Amazon in South America, Sonja Koeppel, secretary of the UN Water Convention, told the Agence France-Presse news agency.

The convention was established in 1992 to help foster responsible joint management of water resources in Europe but opened up in 2016 to countries around the world. It currently has 52 state parties, mainly in Europe, Asia and Africa.

Courtesy, Al Jazeera

According to the report, girls and women are the first victims of water crisis ***PHOTO: PTI***

When you can't trust your eyes anymore: Methods to tackle deepfakes

Deepfakes are threatening privacy and security. Detection methods using deep learning aim to combat this but there's a long way to go.

It started in 2017 when Reddit users uploaded sexually explicit videos using the faces of women celebrities superimposed onto adult film actresses' bodies.

The emergence of such disturbing videos was a result of a sophisticated deep learning algorithm known as "deepfake". It sent shock waves through the world, threatening privacy and societal security.

Within a year, Reddit and other online platforms banned these deepfake porn videos but the problem does not stop there. This advanced technique enables the replacement of one person's likeness with another's.

Some popular examples include applying filters to alter facial attributes; swapping faces with celebrities; transferring facial expressions; or generating a new selfie based on an original photo.

The malicious use of deepfakes has the potential to cause severe psychological harm and tarnish reputations, marking it as a powerful tool capable of inciting social panic and threatening world peace. The development of robust deepfake detectors which are trained to identify the distinct features that distinguish a fake image from a real one, is crucial.

Traditional approaches focus on analysing inconsistencies in pixel distribution, leading to unusual biometric artefacts and facial textures, such as unnatural skin texture, odd shadowing, and abnormal placement of facial attributes, which serve as key indicators for deepfake detection.

However, the evolution of deep learning technology, such as diffusion models, transformers, and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), has made conventional approaches vulnerable.

GAN is the leading technique in deepfake generation. It consists of two models: a generator that creates images and a discriminator that attempts to distinguish whether the image is real or fake. Initially, deepfake images might display noticeable flaws in pixel distribution.

Yet, guided by feedback from the discriminator, the generator learns from its successes and failures to refine its technique. Over time, through continuous training, the generator becomes increasingly adept at producing indistinguishable images.

A video of two women playing Holi inside a metro train went viral with people, including Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) and media houses, claiming that it was made using deepfake technology. However, it was later found that it was not deepfake ***PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/ PREETI.MORYA***

As the digital landscape evolves, the battle against deepfakes has ushered in a new era of detection methods. These are increasingly focusing on deep learning approaches rather than undergoing the tedious process of manually crafting features.

These methods utilise a "black box" approach through convolutional neural networks for feature extraction. This approach allows the model to automatically learn and derive the discriminative features directly from the training data or input features via deep neural networks, streamlining the deepfake detection process.

Within this transformative scenario, researchers are dedicating efforts to develop detection models that specifically target deepfake images from diverse sources to enhance the model's effectiveness in real-world scenarios while minimising the computational resources needed during training.

> Tackling these challenges requires significant technical innovation as well as ethical foresight, coordinating policy, aligning with tools, and engaging in broad public dialogue.It is this comprehensive strategy that will be necessary to truly advance the technology and to do so responsibly and widely enough to make it effective so that it is intended and widely accepted

Their goal is to transform these models by restructuring the model into user-friendly tools that can be seamlessly integrated with social media platforms and applications.

But the journey doesn't end there.

For developers and researchers, continuous learning and adaptation becomes paramount. It is crucial to ensure that the detection models remain effective against the evolving techniques used in deepfake generation, which present challenges in detection and responsible use.

Tackling these challenges requires significant technical innovation as well as ethical foresight, coordinating policy, aligning with tools, and engaging in broad public dialogue.

It is this comprehensive strategy that will be necessary to truly advance the technology and to do so responsibly and widely enough to make it effective so that it is intended and widely accepted.

"Seeing is believing", in an era where deepfakes blur the line between reality and fiction, the pursuit of truth becomes more important than ever. The development of deepfake detection technology serves as far more than a technical challenge. Instead, it emerges as a beacon in our unrelenting pursuit of authenticity.

"Here, we are reminded that even as our eyes may be deceived, our dedication to preserving accuracy ensures that reality will always flicker through. In the war against digital deception, deepfake detection's central and essential role remains as our watchful sentry, ensuring that even in the age of deepfakes, seeing can still mean believing.

—PTI

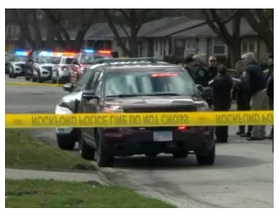


PHOTO: X/ @ABC7NY

4 killed during stabbing spree in Illinois

WASHINGTON, 28 MARCH

Four people have been killed and at least five injured after a man armed with a knife went on a rampage in the US state of Illinois. Police in Rockford say the attacks occurred following a home invasion on Wednesday afternoon. One of the injured is in a critical condition. The victims are a 15-year-old girl, a 63-year-old woman, a 49-year-old man and a 22-year-old man. A man, 22, has been arrested and is being questioned by police. Police said the motive for the attacks remained unclear. The home invasion occurred on Florence Street but the attacks unfolded at multiple locations, police say. Winnebago Country Sheriff Gary Caruana said a young woman had sustained stab wounds to her hands and face after being seen running away from the suspect. *—BBC NEWS*

Taiwan detects 2 Chinese aircraft, 8 navy vessels

TAIPEI, 28 MARCH

Taiwan Defence Ministry detected 20 Chinese military aircraft and eight navy vessels around its nation and entered Taiwan's northern, south-west, and south-east regions between Wednesday (6 am (local time) to Thursday 6 am (local time). According to the Taiwan Ministry of National Defence's statement, Taiwan forces have monitored the situation and employed appropriate forces to respond. In a post on X, the ministry said, "20 PLA aircraft and 8 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 a.m. (UTC+8) today. 14 of the aircraft entered Taiwan's northern, SW, and SE ADIZ. #ROCArmedForces have monitored the situation and employed appropriate forces to respond." *—ANI*

Jr Biden's lawyers push judge to toss out tax charges

LOS ANGELES, 28 MARCH

Attorneys for Hunter Biden asked a judge Wednesday to toss out the tax case accusing him of a four-year scheme to avoid paying USD 1.4 million in taxes while living an extravagant lifestyle. President Joe Biden's son has pleaded not guilty to the nine felony and misdemeanour tax offences. His attorneys argued the prosecution is politically motivated, was tainted by leaks from IRS agents who claimed publicly the case was mishandled and includes some allegations from before he moved to California. Prosecutors framed the claims as far-fetched during the three-hour hearing. Prosecutor Leo Wise scoffed at the idea that the case was tainted by the IRS agents "who I couldn't have picked out of a lineup". *—AP*

China lifts heavy tariffs on Aus wine as ties improve

BEIJING, 28 MARCH

China on Thursday said it will lift tariffs placed on Australian wine over three years ago, in a sign of improving ties between the two countries. China's Ministry of Commerce said the decision will take effect Friday. China imposed tariffs on Australian wine in 2020 during a diplomatic feud, sending duties skyrocketing above 200 per cent. The Australian wine market took a heavy hit from the tariffs, as China was Australia's top wine export destination. Trade tariffs have been a hot topic between Beijing and Canberra in recent years after China imposed a raft of sanctions on Australian goods in 2020 during the most recent nadir in the bilateral relationship. It is estimated that the tariffs cost the Australian economy 20 billion Australian dollars. Most of the tariffs have since been lifted as the relationship thawed. *—AP*

Gaza starvation is war crime, says UNHR

Israel has accused humanitarian activists of not doing enough to distribute aid to Gazans

Smoke rises following an explosion in the Gaza Strip as seen from southern Israel PHOTO: PTI

GAZA, 28 MARCH

After months of warnings, a recent UN-backed report offered hard statistical evidence that the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is turning into a manmade famine.

It has increased the pressure on Israel to fulfil its legal responsibilities to protect Palestinian civilians, and to allow adequate supplies of humanitarian aid to reach the people who need it. The UN's most senior human rights official, Volker Türk, said in a BBC interview that Israel bore significant blame, and that there was a "plausible" case that Israel was using starvation as a weapon of war in Gaza. Türk, who is the UN high commissioner for human rights, said that if intent was proven, that would amount to a war crime. Israel's economy minister, Nir Barkat, a senior politician in Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, dismissed Türk's warnings as "total nonsense - a totally irresponsible thing to say".

Like his cabinet colleagues, Barkat insisted that Israel was letting in all the aid offered by the US and the rest of the world. Israel says the UN fails to distribute whatever is left once Hamas has helped itself.

But a long line of lorries fully loaded with aid supplies desperately needed in the Gaza Strip is backing up on the Egyptian side of the border with Rafah. They can only enter Gaza through Israel, after a complex and bureaucratic series of checks. The absence of adequate supplies has forced Jordan, and now other countries including the US and UK, to drop aid from the air - the least effective way to deliver humanitarian supplies. Palestinians on the ground fighting to secure a share have drowned as they try to swim to pallets that have landed in the sea. *—BBC News*

Death toll climbs after strikes near Lebanon border

JERUSALEM, 28 MARCH

The death toll from Israeli airstrikes across southern Lebanon has climbed to 16, including several militants and members of paramedic groups, according to Lebanese state media and the militant organisations. And in northern Israel, one man was killed by a barrage of at least 30 rockets fired by Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which said it was responding to a deadly airstrike targeting a paramedic centre linked to a Sunni group. International mediators have been scrambling to prevent an all-out war between Israel and Hezbollah amid near-daily violence, mostly confined to the area along the Lebanon -Israel border. *—PTI*

Satellite pic shows 'I love UAE' on Yemen airstrip

DUBAI, 28 MARCH

As Yemen's Houthi rebels continue to target ships in a Mideast waterway, satellite pictures analysed by The Associated Press show what appears to be a new airstrip being built at an entrance to that crucial maritime route.

No country has publicly claimed the construction taking place on Abd al-Kuri Island, a stretch of land rising out of the Indian Ocean near the mouth of the Gulf of Aden. However, satellite images shot for the AP appear to show workers have spelled out "I LOVE UAE" with piles of dirt next to the runway, using an abbreviation for the United Arab Emirates. *—AP*

PHOTO: AP

Doctors visiting hospital stunned by war's toll on Palestinian children

DEIR AL-BALAH, 28 MARCH

An international team of doctors visiting a hospital in central Gaza was prepared for the worst. But the gruesome impact Israel's war against Hamas is having on Palestinian children still left them stunned. One toddler died from a brain injury caused by an Israeli strike that fractured his skull. His cousin, an infant, is still fighting for her life with part of her face blown off by the same strike. An unrelated 10-year-old boy screamed out in pain for his parents, not knowing that they were killed in the strike. Beside him was his sister, but he didn't recognise her because burns covered almost her entire body. *—AP*

Turkey poll: Oppn to hit back at Erdogan

ANKARA, 28 MARCH

Millions of Turks vote in elections on Sunday to decide who runs their biggest cities - and whether President Recep Tayyip Erdogan can wrest back control from the Opposition.

Turkey's economic and social powerhouse, Istanbul, was won by a united Opposition five years ago under popular mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, shattering the president's long run of electoral success. Now Erdogan, who was born in this megacity of 16 million people, wants it back and the vote is on a knife-edge.

Whatever happens in Istanbul is being seen as a crucial test of whether the opposition can pose a serious threat to Mr Erdogan and his AK Party in the next presidential elections in four years' time. "Istanbul is his home. Losing Istanbul to the opposition in the 2019 local elections was devastating for him," says Ihsan Aktas of the department of communication at Istanbul Medipol University and chair of the Genar Political Research Centre. Recep Tayyip Erdogan secured a third term in presidential elections last year, but in this latest vote the main opposition party, the secular CHP, is hoping to hold on to big cities that it won back in dramatic fashion five years ago. Not just Istanbul, but the capital Ankara and the tourist city of Antalya. *—BBC News*

Opposition leaders said Turkey's economic condition is getting worst day by day PHOTO: X/@BBCWORLD

'SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROGRESS'

China will protect Lanka's sovereignty, says Jinping

COLOMBO, 28 MARCH

Chinese President Xi Jinping has assured continuous support to Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena for Sri Lanka's efforts for "political and socio-economic progress" and also said Beijing will stand for safeguarding the island nation's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

China and Sri Lanka agreed to continue to act under the friendship, peace, mutual respect and fivefold principle in international affairs that do not interfere in the internal affairs of a country during a meeting between Xi and Gunawardena on Wednesday at Great Hall in Beijing, the prime minister's office said in a statement here on Thursday.

"Chinese President assured continuous support of China to Sri Lanka's efforts for political and socioeconomic progress. The Chinese President said that China will always stand for safeguarding independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka," the statement said.

"It was emphasised that bilateral relations should be based on mutual respect and mutual productivity between the countries, and acting according to that policy would set a good example for both countries," it added.

President Xi assured that China will support the schemes necessary for the development of Sri Lanka as soon as they are presented. China is willing to work with Sri Lanka to carry forward the spirit of the Rubber-Rice Pact, which is characterised by "independence, self-reliance, unity and mutual support," to consolidate political mutual trust, enhance exchanges of experience in governance, expand practical cooperation, and advance the high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, Xi was quoted as saying in an official press release in Beijing. *—PTI*

The Chinese President said that China will always stand for safeguarding independence, territorial integrity of Sri Lanka PHOTO: X/@XHNEWS

VENEZUELANS INCREASINGLY STUCK IN MEXICO

MEXICO CITY, 28 MARCH

Venezuelan migrants often have a quick answer when asked to name the most difficult stretch of their eight-country journey to the US border, and it's not the days long jungle trek through Colombia and Panama with its venomous vipers, giant spiders and scorpions. It's Mexico.

"In the jungle, you have to prepare for animals. In Mexico, you have to prepare for humans," Daniel Ventura, 37, said after three days walking through the Darien Gap and four months waiting in Mexico to enter the US legally using the government's online appointment system, called CBP One. He and his family of six were headed to Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, where he has a relative.

Mexico's crackdown on immigration in recent months — at the urging of the Biden administration — has hit Venezuelans especially hard. The development highlights how much the US depends on Mexico to control migration, which has reached unprecedented levels and is a top issue for voters as President Joe Biden seeks reelection.

Arrests of migrants for illegally crossing the US-Mexico border have dropped so this year after a record high in December. The biggest decline was among Venezuelans, whose arrests plummeted to 3,184 in February and 4,422 in January from 49,717 in December.

While two months do not make a trend and illegal crossings remain high by historical standards, Mexico's strategy to keep migrants closer to its border with Guatemala than the US is at least temporary relief for the Biden administration. Large numbers of Venezuelans began reaching the US in 2021, first by flying to Mexico and then on foot and by bus after Mexico imposed visa restrictions. In September, Venezuelans briefly replaced Mexicans as the largest nationality crossing the border. *—AP*

Will attack F-16s, not Nato nations: Putin

KYIV, 28 MARCH

Russian President Vladimir Putin scoffed at the possibility of his country launching an attack on a NATO member, calling it "sheer nonsense," but warned that any Western air base hosting US-made F-16 fighter jets that are slated for deployment in Ukraine would be a "legitimate target" for the Kremlin's forces.

"Their statements about our alleged intention to attack Europe after Ukraine is sheer nonsense," Putin said late Wednesday, referring to warnings in the US and Western Europe that Russia could turn its sights on other countries unless it is stopped. He noted that the US defence budget is more than 10 times higher than Russia's. "In view of that, are we going to wage a war against NATO? It's ravings," he told military pilots during a visit to an air base.

Ukraine is awaiting the delivery of F-16s, which will increase military pressure on Russia, from its Western partners. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last year that 42 F-16s had been promised. Ukrainian pilots have been training in the West for months on how to fly the warplanes. F-16s require a high standard of runways and reinforced hangars to protect them from bombing attacks when they are on the ground. It is not clear how many Ukrainian air bases can meet those requirements, and Russia would be certain to quickly target a few that could accommodate them once the jets arrive. Putin warned Ukraine's Western allies against providing air bases in their countries from where the F-16s could launch sorties against the Kremlin's forces. *—AP*

SPECIES IN 17 MOUNTAINS WORLDWIDE FACE EXTINCTION: STUDY REVEALS

NEW DELHI, 28 MAR

Species living in 17 mountains around the world may be facing the risk of extinction due to the rapid rate at which the planet is warming, new research published in the journal Nature has found.

Researchers said that the mountains at significant risk due to global warming included those in the Iran-Pakistan region, Northeast Asia, Brazilian highlands, Western America and Mexico, and the Mediterranean basin.

The international team of researchers, led by Academia Sinica in Taiwan, called for setting up more meteorological monitoring stations in mountainous areas globally, essential for developing a deeper understanding of the extent of such risks.

They explained a new approach they developed to estimate climate velocities in mountainous regions that considers two important influencing factors -- surface warming and humidity -- whilst incorporating the theories of atmospheric science *—PTI*

Baltimore cargo ship had engine maintenance at port

BALTIMORE, 28 MARCH

The cargo ship that lost power and crashed into a bridge in Baltimore underwent "routine engine maintenance" in port beforehand, the US Coast Guard said Wednesday, as divers recovered the bodies of two of six workers who plunged into the water when it collapsed. The others were presumed dead, and officials said search efforts had been exhausted. Investigators began collecting evidence from the vessel a day after it struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge. The bodies of the two men were located in the morning inside a red pickup submerged in about 25 feet (7.6 metres) of water near the bridge's middle span, Col Roland L Butler Jr, superintendent of Maryland State Police, announced at an evening news conference.

He identified the men as Alejandro Hernandez Fuentes, 35, who was from Mexico and living in Baltimore, and Dorlian Ronial Castillo Cabrera, 26, who was from Guatemala and living in Dundalk, Maryland.

The victims, who were part of a construction crew fixing potholes on the bridge, were from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, Butler said. Maryland Gov Wes Moore addressed their families in Spanish during the news conference, saying, "Estamos contigo, ahora y siempre," which means, "We are with you, now and always."

All search efforts have been exhausted, and based on sonar scans, authorities "firmly" believe the other vehicles with victims are encased in material from the collapsed bridge, Butler said. *—AP*

POLITICAL TURMOIL

US guns pour into Haiti, fuelling violence

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 28 MARCH

More than two weeks after the country's prime minister resigned, following a surge of violence in Port-au-Prince, details of a presidential transitional council have still not been revealed.

One of the challenges this council will have to face is the illegal trafficking of guns, which has powered the gangs which have taken over. The escalation in violence has sparked an exodus from the capital.

Among those leaving is 14-year-old David Charles whose father Israel is nervous with excitement as he waits for his son's bus to arrive in Cap-Haitien.

A coach with boarded-up windows pulls up to the side of the road. He smiles in anticipation. His 14-year-old son David soon walks down the stairs with his luggage. They embrace tightly. David has managed to escape Port-au-Prince - a city now torn apart by armed gangs and political chaos. Most of the violence gripping Haiti is centred in the capital: the UN estimates 80% of it is now controlled by gangs.

He had been living there for two years without his parents, in order to finish his education, but Israel did not want him "to become a victim".

This month's torrent of violence spurred him to get his son out to Cap-Haitien, a city in the north of the country which is safer.

Other passengers on the bus look exhausted, relieved but also upset. One man in a dark T-shirt and sunglasses speaks quietly as we ask him how he is. But becomes visibly angry as he tells us he has a message for the United States.

The weapons are fuelling the staggering surge in Haiti's gang-related violence. The UN report said some estimates put it at half a million legal and illegal weapons here as of 2020. *—BBC News*

The escalation in violence has sparked an exodus from the capital PHOTO: BBC

Gold climbs ₹350; silver jumps ₹200

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Gold price climbed Rs 350 to Rs 67,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid strong trends in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities. Extending its gains for the second straight session, the price of the precious metal had settled at Rs 67,000 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver also jumped Rs 200 to Rs 77,450 per kg. In the previous close, it had ended at Rs 77,250 per kg. "Gold prices advanced on Thursday before the outcome of crucial US macro data. Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 67,350 per 10 grams, up by Rs 350 taking positive global cues," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,194 per ounce, up by USD 14 from the previous close. "Gold prices were trading higher amidst positive sentiment regarding interest rates, but the rise in the dollar index could exert pressure on the yellow metal prices. "Strong resistance is observed around the USD 2,200-2,215 range," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst at LKP Securities, said. Silver was also marginally higher at USD 24.55 per ounce. In the previous trade, it had finished at USD 24.50 per ounce.—*ANI*

Rupee falls 6 paise to settle at 83.39 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 28 MARCH

The rupee depreciated 6 paise to settle at 83.39 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday due to a strengthening greenback against major rivals overseas and rising crude oil prices in the international markets. A firm trend in domestic equity markets and recent foreign fund inflows supported the domestic currency, forex traders said. At interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.32 and oscillated between the intra-day peak of 83.30 and the lowest level of 83.40 against the greenback. Local unit finally settled at 83.39, registering a loss of 6 paise from its previous close. On Wednesday, rupee declined 4 paise to close at 83.33 against the US dollar. —*PTI*

Kotak Bank acquires Sonata Finance for ₹537cr

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Kotak Mahindra Bank on Thursday said it has acquired NBFC Sonata Finance Pvt Ltd for Rs 537 crore. Sonata is operating in 10 states through 549 branches and has an Asset Under Management (AUM) of approximately Rs 2,620 crore as of 31 December, 2023. "The Bank has, today, acquired 100 per cent of the issued and paid up capital of Sonata Finance Private Limited, a Non-Banking Finance Company (NBFC), a microfinance institution registered with the RBI for a total consideration of approximately Rs 537 crore," Kotak Bank said in a regulatory filing.—*PTI*

Fiscal deficit at Feb-end touches 86.5% of target

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The government's fiscal deficit at Rs 15 lakh crore touched 86.5 per cent of the revised annual target at the end of February, according to official data released on Thursday. In the corresponding period last year, the fiscal deficit or gap between the expenditure and revenue was 82.8 per cent of Revised Estimates (RE) of the Union Budget 2022-23. For 2023-24, the government's fiscal deficit is estimated at Rs 17.35 lakh crore or 5.8 per cent of the GDP. The government's total receipts stood at Rs 22.45 lakh crore (81.5 per cent of corresponding RE 2023-24 of total receipts) as of February 2024, according to the data released by Controller General of Accounts (CGA). The total expenditure incurred by the Centre was Rs 37.47 lakh crore (83.4 per cent of corresponding RE 2023-24). —*PTI*

NCLT refuses to stay Byju's board meeting today

Tribunal says Byju's is trying to bypass the proceedings

The matter was adjourned to 4 April for hearing on prayers by the investors **PHOTO: PTI**

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) at Bengaluru has refused to stay the extraordinary general meeting (EGM) called by the board of Byju's for Friday.

The board had called for the EGM to increase the authorised capital of its parent company Think and Learn Pvt Ltd to give effect to the rights issue.

A coram of judicial member K Biswal and technical member Manoj Kumar Dubey ruled that in light of the several decisions of the Supreme Court and the High Courts, it was not inclined to stay the EGM.

Byju's was represented by Senior Advocates KG Raghavan and Dhyan Chinappa along with Advocates Rishab Gupta, Manmeet Singh and Sairam Subramanian, briefed by Saraf and Partners.

The investors were represented by Senior Advocates Sudipto Sarkar, Satish Parasaran and Advocate Tine Abraham, briefed by Trilegal.

The tribunal was approached by four investors - EdTech Investments, a subsidiary of Prosus NV; General Atlantic Singapore; Peak XV Partners Operations LLC; and Sofina alleging oppression and mismanagement by Byju's. The petitioners added that in view of these pending applications, the scheduled EGM should be deferred till NCLT decides the issue.

It was argued that with the present EGM, Byju's was trying to bypass the proceedings and thereby render their application alleging oppression and mismanagement as infructuous.

The tribunal, however, clarified that if any decision or resolution is taken at the meeting that the investors are aggrieved by, the same could be challenged.

NCLT Bengaluru had on 27 February recorded a statement by Byju's that there will be no allotment of shares without increasing the authorised share capital of Byju's.

Further, Byju's was directed to consider the extension of the closure date of the rights issue so that the rights of the investors do not get prejudiced.

The matter was adjourned to 4 April for hearing on prayers by the investors seeking ouster of the present management.

The investors approached the tribunal on 20 March challenging a notice by the company for holding the EGM on Friday.

—*Bar and Bench*

KEY EVENTS SO FAR

- Nov 2021: Byju's secures a $1.2 B Term Loan B (TLB)
- Sept 2022: Byju's posts a loss of Rs 4,588 crore
- Oct 2022: Manages to raise $250 M
- Dec 2022: Creditors ask for immediate repay ment of loan
- Jan 2023: Byju's requests for time extension
- March 2023: Byju's fails to meet deadline for disclosing audited results for FY23
- April 2023:Lenders demand prepayment of $200 M
- June 2023: Byju's files lawsuit against lenders of exploitative prac tice

POSITIVE GLOBAL CUES

Markets end FY24 on a buoyant note

MUMBAI, 28 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended the last day of trade of the 2023-24 fiscal on a bullish note on Thursday, driven by heavy buying in power, auto and banking stocks amid a positive trend in global markets.

Extending its previous day's rally, the 30-share index jumped 655.04 points or 0.90 per cent to settle at 73,651.35. During the day, it zoomed 1,194 points or 1.63 per cent to 74,190.31.

The NSE Nifty climbed 203.25 points or 0.92 per cent to end at 22,326.90.

In the 2023-24 financial year, the BSE benchmark jumped 14,659.83 points or 24.85 per cent, and the Nifty soared 4,967.15 points or 28.61 per cent.

From the Sensex basket, Bajaj Finserv jumped nearly 4 per cent, and Bajaj Finance climbed nearly 3 per cent.

Shares of Bajaj Finance and Bajaj Finserv jumped amid media reports that subsidiary Bajaj Housing Finance was planning to go public.

Nestle, State Bank of India, Power Grid, Tata Steel, Larsen & Toubro and Mahindra & Mahindra were the other major gainers.

In contrast, Tech Mahindra, Axis Bank and Reliance Industries were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Tokyo and Seoul ended lower.

European markets were trading mostly in the green. Wall Street ended higher on Wednesday. The S&P 500 climbed 0.9 per cent to a record 5,248.49 in its first gain since setting its last all-time high on 21 March.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 2,170.32 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

"Indian equities closed the day and fiscal year on an optimistic note, with volatility by the end of the session, as buying by retails, DIIs, and FIIs surged across categories," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.42 per cent to USD 86.40 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark climbed 526.01 points or 0.73 per cent to settle at 72,996.31 on Wednesday. The NSE Nifty went up by 118.95 points or 0.54 per cent to 22,123.65.

Equity markets would remain closed on Friday for 'Good Friday'. —*PTI*

EXPANDING BIZ

Adani infuses ₹6,661cr in Ambuja Cements, increases stake to 66.7%

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The Adani family, the promoter of Ambuja Cements, on Thursday announced an infusion of Rs 6,661 crore, increasing its stake by 3.6 per cent to attain 66.7 per cent holding in the country's second largest cement company.

The fund's infusion will be instrumental for the cement business of the Adani Group, which has plans to enhance its capacity to 140 million tonnes per annum by 2028, said a statement from billionaire Gautam Adani-owned Ambuja Cements.

This investment follows an infusion of Rs 5,000 crore by the promoter into the company for exercising the warrants issuance approved by the board in October 2022.

With this, promoters have infused Rs 11,661 crore in Ambuja post acquisition, giving Ambuja capital flexibility for accelerated growth, capital management initiatives and best-in-class balance sheet strength to accomplish its various strategic initiatives, the statement said.

"The additional investment will fortify the company's financial position, providing it with enhanced capabilities to pursue its ambitious growth plans and capitalize on emerging opportunities in the market," it said.

This investment shall also be instrumental in fuelling various strategic initiatives including undertaking debottlenecking capex to enhance operational capabilities to ensure scalability as well as bringing efficiencies across resources, supply chain.

"This shall also drive innovation and product enhancement through advanced technology integration for better service offerings to tap the growing requirements of the sector," it said.

Ambuja Cements CEO Ajay Kapur said this infusion of funds provides "flexibility for fast-tracked growth, capital management initiatives and best-in-class balance sheet strength".

" Ambuja, with its subsidiaries ACC Ltd, has the capacity to produce 77.4 million tonnes of cements annually from 18 integrated cement manufacturing plants and 18 cement grinding units across the country. It had recently acquired Sanghi Industries Ltd.

—*PTI*

PHOTO: AMBUJA CEMENT

ADANI STARTS $1.2 BILLION COPPER PLANT

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Billionaire Gautam Adani-led group on Thursday announced the start of the first phase of the world's largest single-location copper manufacturing plant at Mundra in Gujarat, which will help cut India's dependence on imports and aid energy transition.

Kutch Copper, a subsidiary of group's flagship firm Adani Enterprises Ltd, "commissioned the first phase" of USD 1.2 billion "greenfield copper refinery by dispatching the maiden batch of cathodes to customers", the company said in a statement.The first phase of the facility that will produce 0.5 million tonnes a year of refined copper has started operations and full-scale 1 million tonnes capacity is expected by FY29 (March 2029).India joins China and other nations that are rapidly expanding production of copper, a metal crucial for transition away from fossil fuels. It will create 2,000 direct and 5,000 indirect employment opportunities.

It comes at a time when Vedanta Ltd is seeking to reopen a long-shuttered 400,000 tonnes plant. —*PTI*

Mukesh Ambani, Gautam Adani **PHOTO: PTI**

Ambani and Adani to collaborate for 1st time

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

In the first collaboration between rival billionaires, Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has picked up a 26 per cent stake in a Madhya Pradesh power project of Gautam Adani, and signed a pact to use the plants' 500 MW of electricity for captive use.

Reliance will pick up 5 crore equity shares in Mahan Energen Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Adani Power Ltd, of face value Rs 10 at par (Rs 50 crore) and will use 500 MW of generation capacity for captive use, the two firms said in separate stock exchange filings.

With Ambani's interests spanning oil and gas to retail and telecom and Adani's focus on infrastructure spanning sea ports to airports, coal and mining, they rarely crossed each other's path except in the clean energy business where the two have announced multi-billion investments.Adani aspires to be the world's largest renewable energy producer by 2030 while Reliance is building four gigafactories at Jamnagar in Gujarat . Adani is also building three giga factories for manufacturing solar modules, wind turbines and hydrogen electrolysers.

A clash was also forecast when Adani group applied to participate in an auction of spectrum or airwaves capable of carrying fifth generation (5G) data and voice services. However, unlike Ambani, Adani bought 400 MHz spectrum in the 26 GHz band, which is not for public networks.One unit of 600 MW capacity of MEL's Mahan thermal power plant, out of its aggregate operating and upcoming capacity of 2,800 MW, will be designated as the captive unit for this purpose.

It is unclear where Reliance intends to use the MEL powe r. Reliance already has captive units at mega oil refining and petrochemical complexes in Gujarat and Maharashtra and its coal-bed methane (CBM) extractions in Sohagpur in Madhya Pradesh may not need 500 MW of electricity. —*PTI*

MUSK ANNOUNCES FREE PREMIUM FEATURES FOR X

CALIFORNIA, 28 MARCH

Elon Musk took to X and declared that accounts with over 2500 verified subscribers would receive Premium features for free, while those with over 5000 followers would be entitled to Premium+ features at no cost, on Thursday.

X has an extensive range of premium features available to subscribers across its Premium and Premium+ tiers.

These features aim to empower creators, influencers, and users alike with tools for content creation, monetization, and enhanced interaction.

The Premium tier offers functionalities such as the Edit Post feature, enabling users to make limited changes to published content within a one-hour window.

Additionally, subscribers can exceed the traditional character limit, posting up to 25,000 characters for more detailed and comprehensive content sharing.

Moreover, Premium members can upload longer videos, extending up to approximately three hours in duration and 8GB in file size, enhancing the capacity for multimedia storytelling.

Furthermore, Premium subscribers have the privilege to create communities on X, facilitating connections with like-minded individuals sharing similar interests.

—*ANI*

CISCO STUDY

'Only 5% firms can tackle cyber risks'

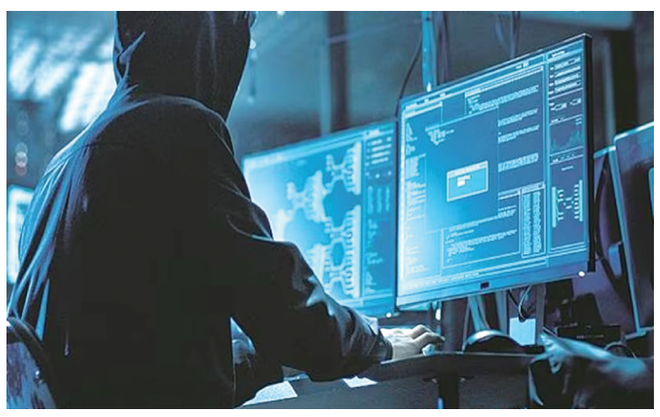
NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Less than 5 per cent of companies in India are ready to deal with cybersecurity risks even though an overwhelming number of them said their businesses are likely to be impacted by such threats in the next 12-24 months, according to a study.

The 2024 Cisco Cybersecurity Readiness Index, which was released on Thursday, found that only 4 per cent of companies in India are ready to tackle today's threats, with 59 per cent of organisations falling into the "beginner or formative stages of readiness".

Globally, 3 per cent of companies are at a "mature stage", meaning they are prepared to handle cybersecurity risks, it said.

Cisco said while companies are building defences against these attacks, they are slowed down by their own overly complex security postures that are dominated by multiple-point solutions.



Globally, 3 per cent of companies are at a 'mature stage', meaning they are prepared to handle cybersecurity risks **PHOTO: PTI**

The study is based on a survey of 8,136 private sector business leaders -- over 1,000 of them from India -- who have cybersecurity responsibilities in their organisations.

The study revealed that 82 per cent of the participants surveyed expect a cybersecurity incident to disrupt their business in the next 12-24 months.

"The cost of being unprepared can be substantial, as 74 per cent of respondents said they experienced a cybersecurity incident in the last 12 months, and 55 per cent of those affected said it cost them at least USD 300,000," it said.

It further said the traditional approach of adopting multiple cybersecurity point solutions has not delivered effective results, as 88 per cent of respondents admitted that having multiple point solutions slowed down their team's ability to detect, respond, and recover from incidents.

While companies are aware of cybersecurity risks, talent gap further intensifies the issue, it said.

"Progress is being further hampered by critical talent shortages, with 91 per cent of companies highlighting it as an issue. In fact, 59 per cent of companies said they had more than 10 roles related to cybersecurity unfilled in their organisation at the time of the survey," the study noted.

However, businesses are increasing their investments to tackle the issue with 71 per cent planning to significantly upgrade their IT infrastructure in the next 12-24 months, the study added. —*PTI*

Coal India's supply to power sector hits 610 MT

KOLKATA, 28 MARCH

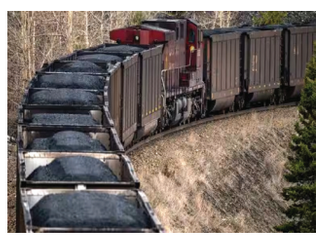


PHOTO: PTI

- The miner's current average daily supply to coal-fired plants stands at 1.76 million tonnes, reflecting the growing demand from the power sector, according to a company statement

Coal India Ltd (CIL) has surpassed its annual supply target of 610 million tonnes to the thermal power sector, achieving 610.8 MT till March 27, a company official said.

"This marks the highest coal supply till date to the power sector," he said.

CIL's coal supply to the sector rose by 29.3 million tonnes in absolute volume terms compared to the corresponding period last fiscal, he said.

The miner's current average daily supply to coal-fired plants stands at 1.76 million tonnes, reflecting the growing demand from the power sector, according to a company statement.

CIL is aiming at boosting production in the wake of the estimated peak demand for electricity of 250 GW this summer.In 2022-23, offtake to power plants reached 586.6 million tonnes, surpassing the commitment of 565 million tonnes, the official said.

As per data, coal stock at domestic coal-based power plants stood at 47.1 million tonnes as of March 26, an increase of 13.7 million tonnes as against the corresponding period last year. —*PTI*

RCB AND KKR EYE COURSE CORRECTION

The RCB dugout might be a happy space after Kohli made a classy 50

BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

Victory in their respective previous games might have eased the initial nerves but imperfections remain, hence Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Kolkata Knight Riders will eye a quick course correction to add steam to their campaign in an IPL 2024 match here on Friday.

The Royal Challengers defeated Punjab Kings by four wickets, while the Knight Riders elbowed out Sunrisers Hyderabad by four runs to garner some early points.

But entering the points table has not eased some of the worries, particularly about the top and middle-order batting.

The Bengaluru dugout might be a happy space after star batter Virat Kohli made a classy fifty on an unusually gripping Chinnaswamy pitch while chasing 177 against Punjab the other night, but that's only one part of the story.

Skipper Faf du Plessis, Glenn Maxwell, Cameroon Green, and Rajat Patidar are yet to hit the overdrive, and for the win against PBKS, they had to rely on the last-minute cameos of Dinesh Karthik and 'Impact Player' Mahipal Lomror.

The Kolkatans have a much more capable bowling unit, at least on paper, and such a collectively underwhelming effort by frontline batters might push RCB into deep troubles against them.

Once they iron out those rough edges, RCB can look at their bowling unit that still needs to fill a couple of unticked boxes despite good outings by pacers Mohammed Siraj and Yash Dayal against Punjab.

Virat Kohli and Andre Russell **PHOTO: PTI**

Pacer Alzarri Joseph continues to be profligate and his figures 0/38, and 1/43 might prompt the RCB think-tank to bring in England left-arm quick Reece Topley, who has impressive white-ball skills, in place of the West Indian for this match. The Knight Riders offer a strikingly similar plot. Their top and middle order consisting of captain Shreyas Iyer, Venkatesh Iyer, Sunil Narine, and Nitish Rana malfunctioned against SRH at the Eden Gardens. It required a combined effort from impact sub-Ramandeep Singh, Rinku Singh, and Andre Russell the 6, 7, 8 for them to post a competitive total.

Shreyas, who is central to their batting plans, was dismissed for a two-ball duck, but the return to Chinnaswamy might give him a sense of relief as he had fruitful outings here in white-ball cricket in his last two innings.

The elegant right-hander made an unbeaten 128 against the Netherlands in last year's World Cup before making a 53 against Australia in the fifth T20I in December.

In bowling, Narine redeemed himself with a frugal spell (1/19) after a modest effort with the bat, but pacer Mitchell Starc, their record buy, and Varun Chakravarthy failed to impress, leaking over 50 runs in their four overs.

The KKR think-tank might not be unduly worried as their campaign is still at a nascent stage, but they would like to see the first-choice pacer and spinner finding their range at the earliest. But it is unlikely that the Knights will make changes to their eleven for this match unless they want to give a go to promising leg-spinner Suyash Sharma, who showed fine form during KKR's pre-season matches. *—PTI*

'FOREIGN PLAYERS WERE FRUSTRATED WITH KKR COACH'

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

Several foreign cricketers in Kolkata Knight Riders were frustrated by head coach Chandrakant Pandit's "militant" style of functioning during the previous edition of the IPL, former South Africa and Namibia all-rounder David Wiese, who played for the franchise last year, has claimed.

The 38-year-old all-rounder, who played three IPL games for KKR in 2023, said foreign cricketers weren't happy at being tutored on how to behave or what to wear by the coach.

"He (Pandit) is known in India as a very militant type of coach. He is very strict, very disciplinarian that type of stuff. Sometimes in franchise cricket, when you have overseas guys, who've played all over the world, they don't need anyone coming and telling them how they need to behave, what they need to wear, and what they need to do the whole time. So, that was tough," said Wiese on the podcast 'Hitman for Hire: A Year in the Life of a Franchise Cricketer' recently.

Pandit took charge as KKR's head coach after New Zealander Brendon McCullum quit the job in 2022. *—PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

RCB vs KKR

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:
Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru

Gillespie quits as Redbacks, Strikers head coach

ADELAIDE, 28 MARCH

Jason Gillespie **PHOTO: PTI**

Jason Gillespie has resigned from his role as Head Coach of the South Australia and Adelaide Strikers. He will finish his role with the South Australia Cricket Association (SACA) at the end of June after a nine-year tenure, the association said on Thursday.

Gillespie took over as Strikers' head coach ahead of the Big Bash League (BBL) 2015-16 season, leading the team for nine seasons, including the maiden Championship in BBL 7 and multiple finals campaigns.

He then returned to South Australia full-time ahead of the 2020/21 summer, taking the reins of the Redbacks during a time of change led by the retirements of several key veterans.

The update came at the end of a disappointing season for South Australia, who finished fifth in the six-team Sheffield Shield table. However, the Strikers made the BBL playoffs, winning the Knockout against Perth Scorchers but losing the Challenger to eventual champions Brisbane Heat.

"I am incredibly proud of what we achieved together at the SACA, and I will always cherish those memories. I do not doubt that South Australian cricket has a bright future," Gillespie said in a statement.

"I would like to thank everyone for their support during my time with the Strikers and Redbacks, it has been a true team effort. To be able to play and coach in my home State has been a wonderful experience, something I feel honored to have achieved. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Warner left out of CA's 2024-25 central contracts list

MELBOURNE, 28 MARCH

Veteran opener David Warner, who has retired from ODI and Test cricket, along with all-rounders Ashton Agar and Marcus Stoinis, was on Thursday dropped from Cricket Australia's list of centrally-contracted players for the 2024-25 season. Besides, Victoria opener Marcus Harris and pacer Michael Neser have also missed out on contracts that were offered to 23 players, according to a report by 'cricket.com.au'. Australia has a hectic season ahead that will feature the T20 World Cup in the USA and West Indies in June and a home Test series against India towards the end of the year among other engagements.*—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Disney Star breaks records on IPL opening day

MUMBAI, 28 MARCH

The 17th edition of the Indian Premier League opened to blockbuster viewership numbers with 16.8 crore viewers tuning in to watch the season's first game between Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru on March 22, the tournament's official broadcaster said on Thursday. Disney Star said the opening day also registered a watch time of 1276 crore minutes the highest ever for the first day of any season. The watch-time minutes are a compilation of the time spent by each viewer in watching the game. The 17th season of IPL also witnessed the highest-ever peak TV concurrency for an opening day, with 6.1 crore viewers watching the broadcast simultaneously on the Disney Star network. "Disney Star had recorded 870 crore minutes on the IPL's opening day in 2023. In comparison to the previous edition, there is a growth of 16 percent in TV consumption."*—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

ACA serves show-cause notice to Hanuma Vihari

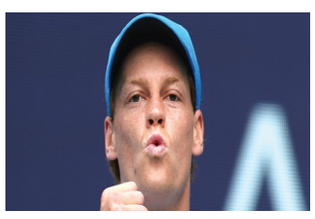
BENGALURU, 28 MARCH

The Andhra Cricket Association has served a show-cause notice to Hanuma Vihari a month after the India batter accused the governing body of unceremoniously removing him from captaincy and vowed not to play for the state again. However, Vihari is yet to respond to the notice which was served after the ACA Apex Council meeting a few days ago. "Yes, we have served him a show-cause notice and we are awaiting his reply," an ACA official told PTI on conditions of anonymity. However, the official said the association did not want to prolong the issue. "This is just to find what made him react the way he did last month. He has not reached out to us, so this is a chance for him to come out with his grievances."After all, we value Vihari and his contributions to the growth of state cricket as he has played.*—PTI*

MIAMI OPEN

Sinner advances to 3rd semifinal in 4 years

MIAMI GARDENS, 28 MARCH



Jannik Sinner **PHOTO: PTI**

Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner won his 20th match of 2024 to reach the Miami Open semifinals for the third time in the past four years with a 6-4, 6-2 victory over Tomas Machac on Wednesday.

Sinner, seeded second, will take on No. 3 seed Daniil Medvedev in a rematch of last year's Miami Open final. Medvedev won that but has lost four straight matchups since.

Medvedev advanced to the latest meeting with a 6-2, 7-6 (7) win over No. 22 seed Nicolas Jarry in a late match.

Sinner reached his fourth final four of the season and moved to 20-1 overall. He reached the finals of this event in 2021 and 2023, losing both times.

"It was a tough match, but I was happy about the performance," Sinner said.

Sinner, 22, said Machac served well early on and his aggressiveness kept things close for a while. But Sinner continued his fabulous run, breaking his opponent's serve four times, to move on to the next round.

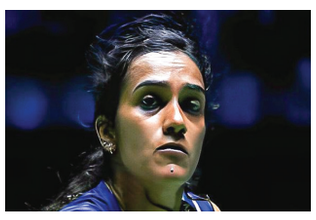
"I always say when it all feels good on the court, it's easy to play tennis," he said. "But it has to start in a practice session when you don't feel well, but you still have to practice and this can make the difference.

"At the moment, I feel really good on the court," he continued.

On the women's side, 14th-seeded Ekaterina Alexandrova followed up her win over No. 1 seed Iga Swiatek with another top-10 victory, taking down No. 5 seed Jessica Pegula 3-6, 6-4, 6-4. Alexandrova earned her first trip to a Miami Open semifinal.

"I think it's like the biggest achievement for me today on this court, and semifinal is a big bonus," Alexandrova said.

Alexandrova will face Danielle Collins, who defeated No. 23 seed Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-2. *—PTI*



PV Sindhu **PHOTO: PTI**

MADRID MASTERS: SINDHU REACHES PRE-QUARTERFINALS

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

The two-time Olympic medalist and former world champion PV Sindhu secured a spot in the pre-quarterfinals of the ongoing Madrid Spain Masters badminton tournament following a win over Canada's Wen Yu Zhang in her first-round game on Wednesday. The second-seeded Sindhu defeated world number 49 Zhang 21-16, 21-12, in 30 minutes to book her round of 16 spot. Currently placed at 11th in world rankings, Sindhu's next challenge will be world No. 63 Huang Yu-Husn of Chinese Taipei, as per the Olympics.com.

Ashmita Chaliha, another challenger for India in the women's singles, crashed out in the first round following a loss to Ratchanok Intanon 21-13, 21-11 in 28 minutes. *—PTI*

Parag's magnificent 84 takes RR to 185 for 5

JAIPUR, 28 MARCH

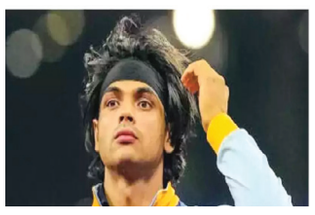
Riyan Parag struck a stunning 84 not out off 45 balls to single-handedly take Rajasthan Royals to 185 for 5 in their Indian Premier League match against Delhi Capitals here on Thursday.

The 22-year-old from Assam, who made 43 in Royals' previous match, took 25 runs off South African pacer Anrich Nortje with scores of 4, 4, 6, 4, 6, 1 in the final over to hit his highest T20 score. His knock was studded with seven fours and six sixes.

Parag held the home side's innings together after they were invited to bat first. He shared 54 and 52 runs respectively with Ravichandran Ashwin (29) and Dhruv Jurel (20) after RR made a shaky start.

Royals captain Sanju Samson threatened to play another destructive innings after his knock of 82 not out in the win against Lucknow Super Giants as he struck three consecutive boundaries in the fourth over bowled by pacer Mukesh Kumar.Ashwin came out to bat at number five and he lofted a Kuldeep delivery for a six to help RR reach 58 for 3.*—PTI*

Riyan Parag **PHOTO: PTI**



Neeraj Chopra **PHOTO: PTI**

CHOPRA IS TO BEGIN SEASON WITH THE DIAMOND LEAGUE

DOHA, 28 MARCH

Reigning Olympic and world champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will begin his season in the Doha leg of the prestigious Diamond League series on 10 May in a star-studded field.The 26-year-old Chopra, who closed his past season with a gold at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China last year, aims to defend his Olympic gold in Paris later this year.

Chopra's compatriot Kishore Jena, who finished fifth in the 2023 Budapest World Championships and won silver in Hangzhou with a personal best of 87.54m, will be making his Diamond League debut at the Qatar capital. Chopra will be up against his well-known rivals like Czech Republic's Jakub Vadlejch, who won silver in the Tokyo Olympics *—AP*

IPL 2024

Captain Hardik Pandya: In search of a sounding board

NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH

It's just two games into the tournament but Hardik Pandya already seems to have loads to worry about in his second stint with Mumbai Indians, the leadership part not quite falling in place thus far.

The exuberant all-rounder, arguably one of the biggest match-winners in the current national set-up, has been, to put it mildly, struggling in the IPL despite being back in the team that shaped him, the one he considers his home. It's been anything but homely ever since Pandya was named captain, replacing the much-loved Rohit Sharma. The results have only made matters worse. Two matches, two losses, some baffling tactics, his form not being the brightest spot and Pandya has his back against the wall within the first week of the tournament.

There is no imminent threat to the 30-year-old's captaincy as the MI owners, after bringing him on board in IPL's biggest one-way transfer, would not want to take any decision in haste.

But a team that is so desperate for success after three barren seasons perhaps cannot also look away from the fact that Pandya is making mistakes and he doesn't seem to have a sounding board for course correction.

He had a solid one during his time as Gujarat Titans skipper when Ashish Nehra would always be in his ears. "I didn't try to convince Hardik to stay back," Nehra had said with a deadpan expression in Ahmedabad in the pre-season press conference when Shubman Gill formally took charge as captain. Nehra is widely seen as the back-room strategist, the one who calls the shot through the captain.

Hardik Pandya during a practice session for Indian Premier League **PHOTO: PTI**

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He is often seen pacing along the boundary line like an overzealous football manager, trying to grab the attention of his captain and players, and shouting down instructions when he gets it.

"It was an open secret in Gujarat Titans camp that Ashu (that's how old teammates address Nehra) was the strategist and Hardik was the executor," a former India teammate, who has played with Nehra, tried to dissect one of the most interesting characters in Indian cricket. "Hardik was good at implementing Ashu's vision.

Ashu is more of a football manager in the garb of a cricket coach. He is constantly hovering around the boundary line with some advice.

He believes, if a skipper is willing to commit, he can prepare the recipe for success. *—PTI*